

Collected Armenian Folktales



This collection contains material from Robert Arnot's *Armenian Literature* (New York, 1902), and from Leon Surmelian's *Apples of Immortality* (Los Angeles, 1968). The art work is from the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (New York, 1946), illustrated by Sarkis Katchadourian.

[Selections from *Armenian Literature*](#), by Robert Arnot.

[Table of Contents for Arnot](#)

[Apples of Immortality](#), Folktales of Armenia, by Leon Surmelian.

[Table of Contents for Surmelian](#)

Prepared by Robert Bedrosian, 2020.

This material is presented solely for non-commercial educational/research purposes.



ARMENIAN LITERATURE

COMPRISING
POETRY, DRAMA, FOLK-LORE
AND
CLASSIC TRADITIONS

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH FOR THE FIRST TIME

WITH A SPECIAL INTRODUCTION BY
ROBERT ARNOT, M.A.

LIMITED EDITION DE LUXE

THE COLONIAL PRESS
LONDON · PARIS · NEW YORK

**COPYRIGHT, 1902,
BY THE COLONIAL PRESS.**

SPECIAL INTRODUCTION

THE literature of ancient Armenia that is still extant is meagre in quantity and to a large extent ecclesiastical in tone. To realize its oriental color one must resort entirely to that portion which deals with the home life of the people, with their fasts and festivals, their emotions, manners, and traditions. The ecclesiastical character of much of the early Armenian literature is accounted for by the fact that Christianity was preached there in the first century after Christ, by the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew, and that the Armenian Church is the oldest national Christian Church in the world.

It is no doubt owing to the conversion of the entire Armenian nation under the passionate preaching of Gregory the Illuminator that most of the literary products of primitive Armenia—the mythological legends and chants of heroic deeds sung by bards—are lost. The Church would have none of them. Gregory not only destroyed the pagan temples, but he sought to stamp out the pagan literature—the poetry and recorded traditions that celebrated the deeds of gods and goddesses and of national heroes. He would have succeeded, too, had not the romantic spirit of the race clung fondly to their ballads and folk-lore. Ecclesiastical historiographers in referring to those times say quaintly enough, meaning to censure the people, that in spite of their great religious advantages the Armenians persisted in singing some of their heathen ballads as late as the twelfth century. Curiously enough, we owe the fragments we possess of early Armenian poetry to these same ecclesiastical critics. These fragments suggest a popular poesy, stirring and full of powerful imagery, employed mostly in celebrating royal marriages, religious feasts, and containing dirges for the dead, and ballads of customs—

not a wide field, but one invaluable to the philologist and to ethnological students.

The Christian chroniclers and critics, however, while preserving but little of the verse of early Armenia, have handed down to us many legends and traditions, though they relate them, unfortunately, with much carelessness and with a contempt for detail that is often exasperating to one seeking for instructive parallelisms between the heroic legends of different nations. Evidently the only object of the ecclesiastical chroniclers in preserving these legends was to invest their descriptions of the times with a local color. Even Moses of Chorene, who by royal command collected many of these legends, and in his sympathetic treatment of them evinces poetic genius and keen literary appreciation, fails to realize the importance of his task. After speaking of the old Armenian kings with enthusiasm, and even condoning their paganism for the sake of their virility, he leaves his collection in the utmost disorder and positively without a note or comment. In the face of such difficulties, therefore, it has been hard to present specimens of early Armenian folk-lore and legends that shall give the reader a rightful idea of the race and the time.

As Armenia was the highroad between Asia and Europe, these old stories and folk-plays show the influence of migrating and invading people. The mythology of the Chaldeans and Persians mingles oddly with traditions purely Armenian. This is well shown in the story of David of Sassun, given in this volume. David was the local hero of the place where Moses of Chorene was born and probably spent his declining years, after years of literary labor and study in Athens and Alexandria. The name of the district was Mush, and close by the monastery in which Moses was buried lies the village of Sassun.

David's history is rich in personal incident, and recalls to the reader the tales related of the Persian Izdubar, the Chaldeo-Babylonian Nimrod, and the Greek Heracles. He is as much the hero of the tale as is Joseph Andrews in Fielding's classic of that name. His marvellous strength is used as handily for a jest as for some prodigious victory over man or monster. He is drawn for us as a bold, reckless fellow,

with a rollicking sense of humor, which, in truth, sits but awkwardly upon the intense devotion to the Cross and its demands with which Moses or some later redactor has seen fit to burden this purely pagan hero. David is very human in spite of his blood-stained club and combative instincts, and his kindliness and bonhomie awake in us a passing disappointment at his untimely demise.

If we except some ecclesiastical writings, these fragments preserved by Moses of Chorene and others comprehend all that is left to us of the literature of Armenia antedating the Persian invasion. After the Persian flood of fire and sword had rolled over this Asiatic Poland, the stricken Christian Church revived. A monk named Mesrob set to work to revive the spirit of literature. His difficulties were great. It was not alone the resuscitating of a dead literary desire, but it entailed also the providing of a vehicle of expression, namely an alphabet, so deeply had the Persian domination imprinted itself upon the land. As might be expected, the primary results of the revival were didactic, speculative, or religious in character. Mysticism at that time flourished in the monasteries, and the national spirit—the customs, habits, joys, and emotions of the people—had not yet found re-expression in script. The Church became the dominant power in literature, and if it is true on the one hand that the Armenian people lost intellectual independence, it is also true on the other that they gained that religious zeal and strength which enabled them as an entity—a united race—to survive the fatal day of Avarair, where, under the shadow of hoary Ararat, the Armenian Marathon was fought and lost, and Vartan, their national hero, died. All sorts of traditions cluster still around the battlefield of Avarair. A species of red flower grows there that is nowhere else to be found, and it is commonly believed that this red blossom sprang originally from the blood of the slain Armenian warriors. On the plain of Avarair is also found a small antelope with a pouch upon its breast secreting musk—a peculiarity gained, they say, from feeding on grass soaked with the blood of Armenia's sons. And at Avarair, too, it is said that the lament of the nightingales is ever, "Vartan, Vartan." The story of these times is preserved in fragments in the religious chronicles of Lazarus of Pharb and of Eliseus.

When, during the Persian domination, Armenia became entirely shut off from the avenues of Greek culture, and was left unaided in her struggle for national existence, the light of literature again sank to a feeble gleam. There was, indeed, a faint revival in the tenth century, and again a second and a stronger renaissance in the twelfth under the impulse given by Nerses, and by his namesake, the Patriarch. But this revival, like the former, was not general in character. It was mostly a revival of religious mysticism in literature, not of the national spirit, though to this epoch belong the choicest hymnological productions of the Armenian Church.

There are no chronicles extant that can be called purely Armenian. The oldest chronicles that we have of Armenia—and there are many—wander off into the histories of other people—of the Byzantines, for instance, and even of the Crusaders. The passages that deal with Armenia are devoted almost entirely to narrating the sufferings of the Armenians under the successive invasions of pagans and Mahometans, and the efforts made to keep the early Christian faith—forming almost a national book of martyrs, and setting forth a tragic romance of perpetual struggle. These records cannot be called Armenian literature in a real sense, for in many cases they were not written by Armenians, but they picture in vivid fashion the trials suffered by Armenians at the hands of invading nations, and the sacrifices made to preserve a national existence. They picture, in pages bristling with horrible detail, the sacrifices and sufferings of a desperate people, and in them we see Armenia as the prophet saw Judea, “naked, lying by the wayside, trodden under foot by all nations.” These chronicles have an interest all their own, but they lack literary beauty, and not being, in themselves, Armenian literature, have not been included in the selections made as being purely representative of the race and land.

The examples of Armenian proverbs and folk-lore included in this volume show, as is usual, the ethnological relationship that is so easily traced between the fables of Æsop, of Bidpai, of Vartan, and of Loqman. It may be said with truth that in the folk-lore and fables of all nations can be traced kinship of imagination, with a variety of application that differs with the customs and climate of the people. But the

Armenian is especially rich in a variety of elements. We meet enchantments, faculties, superstitions, and abstract ideas personified, which are supposed to attach miraculous meanings to the most ordinary events. Dreams, riddles, and the like—all are there. The one strange personification is the Dew. The Dew is a monster, half demon, half human; sometimes harmless, sometimes malevolent; mortal, indeed, but reaching a good or, shall we say, an evil old age. The Dew figures in nearly all Armenian fairy-tales.

The Armenian proverbs exhibit the persistent capacity of the Armenians during a time of *Sturm und Drang* to embody, in pithy, wise, and sometimes cynical form, the wisdom drawn from their own experience and from that of the ages. It is possible that the cynical vein discernible in some of these proverbs is a result of the intense and continued national trials. Take, for instance, this proverb, "If a brother were a good thing, God would have provided himself with one." Can anything be more cynical?

The poems are of later origin. Since the twelfth century, when literature burst the bonds imposed upon it by ecclesiastical domination, the poetic spirit of the Armenians has found expression. It is rich in oriental passion and imagery, brilliant in expression, and intensely musical. But through all the poems we are reminded of the melancholy strain that pervaded the exiles of Jerusalem when "by the waters of Babylon" they "sat down and wept." The apostrophe to Araxes reminds us of the trials of Armenia, of her exiled sons, of her wasted land, and of the perpetual fast she ever keeps in mourning for her children.

The comedy of "The Ruined Family" and the pathetic story of "The Vacant Yard" are also of the post-monastic era. In the comedy we gain an insight into the jealousy and the pride of life that pervaded then as now the middle walks of life. Its Ibsenesque quality is very striking. The persistent and human struggle of the mother to gain a high position in life for her daughter through marriage, and the agonizing of the father to get together a suitable dowry for his daughter, together with the worldly-wise comments and advice of the old aunt, are so true to modern life that one realizes anew the sameness of human nature in all climes and ages.

"The Vacant Yard" gives us a charming picture of Armenian life. The people are depicted with an impartial pen, subject to the minor crosses and humors of fate, having their ups and downs just as we do to-day, but the intense local color that pervades the story holds one to the closing line.

As a people the Armenians cannot boast of as vast a literature as the Persians, their one-time conquerors, but that which remains of purely Armenian prose, folk-lore, and poetry tells us of a poetic race, gifted with imaginative fire, sternness of will, and persistency of adherence to old ideas, a race that in proportion to their limited production in letters can challenge comparison with any people.

Robert Arnot

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PROVERBS AND FOLK-LORE	3
THE VACANT YARD.....	19
ARMENIAN POEMS	
A Plaint.....	47
Spring in Exile	48
Fly, Lays of Mine	48
The Woe of Araxes.....	49
The Armenian Maiden	51
One of a Thousand	52
Longing	53
DAVID OF SASSUN.....	57
THE RUINED FAMILY.....	81

PROVERBS AND FOLK-LORE

[Translated by F. B. Collins, B.S.]

PROVERBS AND FOLK-LORE

I KNOW many songs, but I cannot sing.
When a man sees that the water does not follow him,
he follows the water.
When a tree falls there is plenty of kindling wood.
He who falls into the water need have no fear of rain.
A good swimmer finds death in the water.
Strong vinegar bursts the cask.
Dogs quarrel among themselves, but against the wolf they
are united.
God understands the dumb.
Only he who can read is a man.
The chick shows itself in the egg, the child in the cradle.
What a man acquires in his youth serves as a crutch in his
old age.
One wit is good ; two wits are better.
Begin with small things, that you may achieve great.
A devil with experience is better than an angel without.
What the great say, the humble hear.
He who steals an egg will steal a horse also.
Turn the spit, so that neither meat nor roasting-iron shall
burn.
One can spoil the good name of a thousand.
What manner of things thou speakest of, such shalt thou
also hear.
The grandfather ate unripe grapes, and the grandson's teeth
were set on edge.
One bad deed begets another.
Go home when the table is set, and to church when it is
almost over.
A devil at home, a parson abroad.
God created men and women : who, then, created monks ?
Poor and proud.
In dreams the hungry see bread and the thirsty water.

Ere the fat become lean, the lean are already dead.
Wish for a cow for your neighbor, that God may give you
two.

What is play to the cat is death to the mouse.
Unless the child cries, the mother will not suckle it.
A fish in the water is worth nothing.
Gold is small but of great worth.
At home the dog is very brave.
Observe the mother ere you take the daughter.
If you lose half and then leave off, something is gained.
The good mourn for what was taken away, the wolf for what
was left behind.

Only a bearded man can laugh at a beardless face.
He descends from a horse and seats himself on an ass.
No other day can equal the one that is past.
When a man grows rich, he thinks his walls are awry.
Make friends with a dog, but keep a stick in your hand.
One should not feel hurt at the kick of an ass.
The blind have no higher wish than to have two eyes.
The thief wants only a dark night.
A thief robbed another thief, and God marvelled at it in
heaven.

He who has money has no sense; and he who has sense,
no money.

He who begs is shameless, but still more shameless is he
who lends not to him.

Better lose one's eyes than one's calling.

What the wind brings it will take away again.

A bad dog neither eats himself nor gives to others.

Running is also an art.

Only in the bath can one tell black from white.

Water is sure to find its way.

What does the blind care if candles are dear?

Speak little and you will hear much.

No one is sure that his light will burn till morning.

He who speaks the truth must have one foot in the stirrup.

The more you stone a dog the more he barks.

One blossom does not make a spring.

One hand cannot clap alone.

Strike the iron while it is hot.

Take up a stick, and the thieving dog understands.
 Corruption illumines dark paths.
 When they laid down the law to the wolf, he said, "Be quiet,
 or the sheep will run away."
 One hears Ali is dead; but one knows not which one.
 The scornful soon grow old.
 Who shall work? I and thou. Who shall eat? I and
 thou.
 Stay in the place where there is bread.
 If bread tastes good, it is all one to me whether a Jew or a
 Turk bakes it.
 One loves the rose, another the lilac.
 Before Susan had done prinking, church was over.
 The simpleton went to the wedding and said, "Indeed, it
 is much better here than it is at home."
 He sleeps for himself and dreams for others.
 The flower falls under the bush.
 Not everything round is an apple.
 What does an ass know about almonds?
 A king must be worthy of a crown.
 When you are going in consider first how you are coming
 out.
 What thou canst do to-day leave not until to-morrow.
 The rose of winter-time is fire.
 The end of strife is repentance.
 From the same flower the serpent draws poison and the
 bees honey.
 My heart is no table-cover to be spread over everything.
 As long as the wagon is not upset the way is not mended.
 The water that drowns me is for me an ocean.
 The Armenian has his understanding in his head, the
 Georgian in his eyes.
 The ass knows seven ways of swimming, but when he sees
 the water he forgets them all.
 The wound of a dagger heals, but that of the tongue, never.
 A good ox is known in the yoke, a good woman at the
 cradle of her child.
 Love ever so well, there is also hate; hate ever so much,
 there is always love.
 A shrewd enemy is better than a stupid friend.

To rise early is not everything; happy are they who have the help of God.

A dress that is not worn wears itself out.

I came from the ocean and was drowned in a spoonful of water.

Because the cat could get no meat, he said, "To-day is Friday."

The house that a woman builds God will not destroy; but a woman is likely to destroy the house that God has built.

The dowry a woman brings into the house is a bell. Whenever you come near, the clapper strikes in your face.

By asking, one finds the way to Jerusalem.

Which of the five fingers can you cut off without hurting yourself?

The father's kingdom is the son's mite.

Far from the eye, far from the heart.

If a brother was really good for anything, God would have one.

When God gives, He gives with both hands.

A daughter is a treasure which belongs to another.

The world is a pair of stairs: some go up and others go down.

The poor understand the troubles of the poor.

The childless have one trouble, but those who have children have a thousand.

God turns away his face from a shameless man.

The eyes would not disagree even if the nose were not between them.

Until you see trouble you will never know joy.

You never know a man until you have eaten a barrel of salt with him.

Every man's own trouble is as large as a camel.

The goat prefers one goat to a whole herd of sheep.

The fox has destroyed the world, and the wolf has lost his calling.

The fool throws himself into the stream, and forty wise men cannot pull him out.

A near neighbor is better than a distant kinsman.

When I have honey, the flies come even from Bagdad.

A guest comes from God.

The guest is the ass of the inn-keeper.

When everything is cheap the customer has no conscience.

THE SHEEP-BROTHER

Once there was a widow and she had a daughter. The widow married a widower who had by his first wife two children, a boy and a girl. The wife was always coaxing her husband: "Take the children, do, and lead them up into the mountains." Her husband could not refuse her, and, lo! one day he put some bread in his basket, took the children, and set off for the mountain.

They went on and on and came to a strange place. Then the father said to the children, "Rest here a little while," and the children sat down to rest. The father turned his face away and wept bitterly, very bitterly. Then he turned again to the children and said, "Eat something," and they ate. Then the boy said, "Father, dear, I want a drink." The father took his staff, stuck it into the ground, threw his coat over it, and said, "Come here, my son, sit in the shadow of my coat, and I will get you some water." The brother and sister stayed and the father went away and forsook his children. Whether they waited a long time or a short time before they saw that their father was not coming back is not known. They wandered here and there looking for him, but saw no human being anywhere.

At last they came back to the same spot, and, beginning to weep, they said:

"Alas! Alas! See, here is father's staff, and here is his coat, and he comes not, and he comes not."

Whether the brother and sister sat there a long time or a short time is not known. They rose after a while, and one took the staff and the other the coat, and they went away without knowing whither. They went on and on and on, until they saw tracks of horses' hoofs filled with rain-water.

"I am going to drink, sister," said the brother.

"Do not drink, little brother, or you will become a colt," said the sister.

They passed on till they saw tracks of oxen's hoofs.

"O sister dear, how thirsty I am!"

"Do not drink, little brother, or you will be a calf," the sister said to him.

They went on till they saw the tracks of buffalo hoofs.

"O sister dear, how thirsty I am!"

"Drink not, little brother, or you will be a buffalo calf."

They passed on and saw the tracks of bears' paws.

"Oh, I am so thirsty, sister dear."

"Drink not, little brother, or you will become a little bear."

They went on and saw the tracks of swine's trotters.

"O sister dear, I am going to drink."

"Drink not, little brother, or you will become a little pig."

They went on and on till they saw the tracks of the pads of wolves.

"O sister dear, how thirsty I am!"

"Do not drink, little brother, or you will become a little wolf."

They walked on and on till they saw the tracks of sheep's trotters.

"O sister dear, I am almost dying with thirst."

"O little brother, you grieve me so! You will, indeed, be a sheep if you drink."

He could stand it no longer. He drank and turned into a sheep. He began to bleat and ran after his sister. Long they wandered, and at last came home.

Then the stepmother began to scheme against them. She edged up to her husband and said: "Kill your sheep. I want to eat him."

The sister got her sheep-brother away in the nick of time and drove him back into the mountains. Every day she drove him to the meadows and she spun linen. Once her distaff fell from her hand and rolled into a cavern. The sheep-brother stayed behind grazing while she went to get the distaff.

She stepped into the cavern and saw lying in a corner a Dew, one thousand years old. She suddenly spied the girl and said: "Neither the feathered birds nor the crawling serpent can make their way in here; how then hast thou, maiden, dared to enter?"

The girl spoke up in her fright. "For love of you I came here, dear grandmother."

The old Dew mother bade the girl come near and asked her this and that. The maiden pleased her very much. "I will go and bring you a fish," she said, "you are certainly

hungry." But the fishes were snakes and dragons. The girl was sorely frightened and began to cry with terror. The old Dew said, "Maiden, why do you weep?" She answered, "I have just thought of my mother, and for her sake I weep." Then she told the old mother everything that had happened to her. "If that is so," said the Dew, "sit down here and I will lay my head on your knee and go to sleep."

She made up the fire, stuck the poker into the stove, and said:

"When the devil flies by do not waken me. If the rainbow-colored one passes near, take the glowing poker from the stove and lay it on my foot."

The maiden's heart crept into her heels from fright. What was she to do? She sat down, the Dew laid her head on her knees and slept. Soon she saw a horrible black monster flying by. The maiden was silent. After a while there came flying by a rainbow-colored creature. She seized the glowing poker and threw it on the old Dew's foot. The old mother awoke and said, "Phew, how the fleas bite." She rose and lifted up the maiden. The girl's hair and clothing were turned to gold from the splendor of the rainbow colors. She kissed the old Dew's hand and begged that she might go. She went away, and taking her sheep-brother with her started for home. The stepmother was not there, and the maiden secretly dug a hole, buried her golden dress, and sat down and put on an old one.

The stepmother came home and saw that the maiden had golden hair.

"What have you done to your hair to make it like gold?" she asked. The maiden told her all, how and when. The next day the stepmother sent her own daughter to the same mountain. The stepmother's daughter purposely let her distaff fall and it rolled into the hole. She went in to get it, but the old Dew mother turned her into a scarecrow and sent her home.

About that time there was a wedding in the royal castle; the King was giving one of his sons in marriage, and the people came from all directions to look on and enjoy themselves.

The stepmother threw on a kerchief and smartened up the head of her daughter and took her to see the wedding. The

girl with the golden hair did not stay at home, but, putting on her golden dress so that she became from head to foot a gleaming houri, she went after them.

But on the way home, she ran so fast to get there before her stepmother, that she dropped one of her golden shoes in the fountain. When they led the horses of the King's second son to drink, the horses caught sight of the golden shoe in the water and drew back and would not drink. The King caused the wise men to be called, and asked them to make known the reason why the horses would not drink, and they found only the golden shoe. The King sent out his herald to tell the people that he would marry his son to whomsoever this shoe fitted.

He sent people throughout the whole city to try on the shoe, and they came to the house where the sheep-brother was. The stepmother pushed the maiden with the golden locks into the stove, and hid her, and showed only her own daughter.

A cock came up to the threshold and crowed three times, "Cock-a-doodle doo! The fairest of the fair is in the stove." The King's people brushed the stepmother aside and led the maiden with golden hair from the stove, tried on the shoe, which fitted as though moulded to the foot.

"Now stand up," said they, "and you shall be a royal bride."

The maiden put on her golden dress, drove her sheep-brother before her, and went to the castle. She was married to the King's son, and seven days and seven nights they feasted.

Again the stepmother took her daughter and went to the castle to visit her stepdaughter, who in spite of all treated her as her mother and invited her into the castle garden. From the garden they went to the seashore and sat down to rest. The stepmother said, "Let us bathe in the sea." While they were bathing she pushed the wife of the King's son far out into the water, and a great fish came swimming by and swallowed her.

Meanwhile the stepmother put the golden dress on her own daughter and led her to the royal castle and placed her in the seat where the young wife always sat, covering her face and her head so that no one would know her.

The young wife sat in the fish and heard the voice of the

bell-ringer. She called to him and pleaded: "Bell-ringer, O bell-ringer, thou hast called the people to church; cross thyself seven times, and I entreat thee, in the name of heaven, go to the prince and say that they must not slaughter my sheep-brother."

Once, twice the bell-ringer heard this voice and told the King's son about it.

The King's son took the bell-ringer with him and went at night to the seashore. The same voice spoke the same words. He knew that it was his dear wife that spoke, and drew his sword and ripped open the fish and helped his loved one out.

They went home, and the prince had the stepmother brought to him, and said to her: "Mother-in-law, tell me what kind of a present you would like: a horse fed with barley or a knife with a black handle?"

The stepmother answered: "Let the knife with a black handle pierce the breast of thine enemy; but give me the horse fed with barley."

The King's son commanded them to tie the stepmother and her daughter to the tail of a horse, and to hunt them over mountain and rock till nothing was left of them but their ears and a tuft of hair.

After that the King's son lived happily with his wife and her sheep-brother. The others were punished and she rejoiced.

And three apples fell down from heaven.

THE YOUTH WHO WOULD NOT TELL HIS DREAM

There lived once upon a time a man and wife who had a son. The son arose from his sleep one morning and said to his mother: "Mother dear, I had a dream, but what it was I will not tell you."

The mother said, "Why will you not tell me?"

"I will not, and that settles it," answered the youth, and his mother seized him and cudgelled him well.

Then he went to his father and said to him: "Father dear, I had a dream, but what it was I would not tell mother, nor will I tell you," and his father also gave him a good flogging. He began to sulk and ran away from home. He walked and

walked the whole day long and, meeting a traveller, said after greeting him: "I had a dream, but what it was I would tell neither father nor mother and I will not tell you." Then he went on his way till finally he came to the Emir's house and said to the Emir: "Emir, I had a dream, but what it was I would tell neither father nor mother, nor yet the traveller, and I will not tell you."

The Emir had him seized and thrown into the garret, where he began to cut through the floor with a knife he managed to get from some one of the Emir's people. He cut and cut until he made an opening over the chamber of the Emir's daughter, who had just filled a plate with food and gone away. The youth jumped down, emptied the plate, ate what he wanted, and crept back into the garret. The second, third, and fourth days he did this also, and the Emir's daughter could not think who had taken away her meal. The next day she hid herself under the table to watch and find out. Seeing the youth jump down and begin to eat from her plate, she rushed out and said to him, "Who are you?"

"I had a dream, but what it was I would tell neither father nor mother, nor the traveller, nor yet the Emir. The Emir shut me up in the garret. Now everything depends on you; do with me what you will."

The youth looked at the maiden, and they loved each other and saw each other every day.

The King of the West came to the King of the East to court the daughter of the King of the East for his son. He sent an iron bar with both ends shaped alike and asked: "Which is the top and which is the bottom? If you can guess that, good! If not, I will carry your daughter away with me."

The King asked everybody, but nobody could tell. The King's daughter told her lover about it and he said: "Go tell your father the Emir to throw the bar into a brook. The heavy end will sink. Make a hole in that end and send the bar back to the King of the West." And it happened that he was right, and the messengers returned to their King.

The King of the West sent three horses of the same size and color and asked: "Which is the one-year-old, which is the two-year-old, and which the mare? If you can guess that, good. If not, then I will carry off your daughter."

The King of the East collected all the clever people, but no one could guess. He was helpless and knew not what to do. Then his daughter went to her lover and said, "They are going to take me away," and she told him when and how.

The youth said: "Go and say to your father, 'Dip a bundle of hay in water, strew it with salt, and put it near the horses' stall. In the morning the mare will come first, the two-year-old second, the one-year-old last.'"

They did this and sent the King of the West his answer.

He waited a little and sent a steel spear and a steel shield, and said: "If you pierce the shield with the spear, I will give my daughter to your son. If not, send your daughter to my son."

Many people tried, and among them the King himself, but they could find no way of piercing the shield. The King's daughter told him of her beloved prisoner, and the King sent for him. The youth thrust the spear into the ground, and, striking the shield against it, pierced it through.

As the King had no son, he sent the youth in place of a son to the King of the West to demand his daughter, according to agreement.

He went on and on—how long it is not known—and saw someone with his ear to the ground listening.

"Who are you?" the youth asked.

"I am he who hears everything that is said in the whole world."

"This is a brave fellow," said the youth. "He knows everything that is said in the world."

"I am no brave fellow. He who has pierced a steel shield with a steel spear is a brave fellow," was the answer.

"I am he," said the youth. "Let us be brothers."

They journeyed on together and saw a man with a millstone on each foot, and one leg stepped toward Chisan and the other toward Stambul.

"That seems to me a brave fellow! One leg steps toward Chisan and the other toward Stambul."

"I am no brave fellow. He who has pierced a steel shield with a steel spear is a brave fellow," said the man with the millstones.

"I am he. Let us be brothers."

They were three and they journeyed on together.

They went on and on and saw a mill with seven millstones grinding corn. And one man ate all and was not satisfied, but grumbled and said, "O little father, I die of hunger."

"That is a brave fellow," said the youth. "Seven millstones grind for him and yet he has not enough, but cries, 'I die of hunger.'"

"I am no brave fellow. He who pierced a steel shield with a steel spear is a brave fellow," said the hungry man.

"I am he. Let us be brothers," said the youth and the four journeyed on together. They went on and on and saw a man who had loaded the whole world on his back and even wished to lift it up.

"That is a brave fellow. He has loaded himself with the whole world and wishes to lift it up," said the youth.

"I am no brave fellow. He who has pierced a steel shield with a steel spear is a brave fellow," said the burdened man.

"I am he. Let us be brothers."

The five journeyed on together. They went on and on and saw a man lying in a brook and he sipped up all its waters and yet cried, "O little father, I am parched with thirst."

"That is a brave fellow. He drinks up the whole brook and still says he is thirsty," said the youth.

"I am no brave fellow. He who has pierced a steel shield with a steel spear is a brave fellow," said the thirsty man.

"I am he. Let us be brothers."

The six journeyed on together. They went on and on and saw a shepherd who was playing the pipes, and mountains and valleys, fields and forests, men and animals, danced to the music.

"That seems to me to be a brave fellow. He makes mountains and valleys dance," said the youth.

"I am no brave fellow. He who has pierced a steel shield with a steel spear is a brave fellow," said the musical man.

"I am he. Let us be brothers," said the youth.

The seven journeyed on together.

"Brother who hast pierced a steel shield with a steel spear, whither is God leading us?"

"We are going to get the daughter of the King of the West," said the youth.

"Only you can marry her," said they all.

They went on till they came to the King's castle, but when they asked for the daughter the King would not let her go, but called his people together and said: "They have come after the bride. They are not very hungry, perhaps they will eat only a bite or two. Let one-and-twenty ovens be filled with bread and make one-and-twenty kettles of soup. If they eat all this I will give them my daughter; otherwise, I will not."

The seven brothers were in a distant room. He who listened with his ear to the ground heard what the King commanded, and said:

"Brother who hast pierced a steel shield with a steel spear, do you understand what the King said?"

"Rascal! how can I know what he says when I am not in the same room with him? What did he say?"

"He has commanded them to bake bread in one-and-twenty ovens and to make one-and-twenty kettles of soup. If we eat it all, we can take his daughter; otherwise, not."

The brother who devoured all the meal that seven millstones ground said: "Fear not, I will eat everything that comes to hand, and then cry, 'Little father, I die of hunger.'"

When the King saw the hungry man eat he screamed: "May he perish! I shall certainly meet defeat at his hands."

Again he called his people to him and said, "Kindle a great fire, strew it with ashes and cover it with blankets. When they come in in the evening they will be consumed, all seven of them."

The brother with the sharp ears said: "Brother who hast pierced a steel shield with a steel spear, do you understand what the King said?"

"No; how can I know what he said?"

"He said, 'Kindle a fire, strew it with ashes, and cover it with blankets, and when they come in in the evening they will be consumed, all seven of them.'"

Then said the brother who drank up the brook: "I will drink all I can and go in before you. I will spit it all out and turn the whole house into a sea."

In the evening they begged the King to allow them to rest in the room set apart for them. The water-drinker filled the whole room with water, and they went into another.

The King lost his wits and knew not what to do. He called his people together, and they said in one voice, "Let what will happen, we will not let our princess go!"

The man with the sharp ears heard them, and said, "Brother who hast pierced a steel shield with a steel spear, do you understand what the King said?"

"How should I know what he said?"

"He said, 'Let what will happen, I will not let my daughter go.'"

The brother who had loaded himself with the whole world said: "Wait, I will take his castle and all his land on my back and carry it away."

He took the castle on his back and started off. The shepherd played on his pipes, and mountains and valleys danced to the music. He who had fastened millstones to his feet led the march, and they all went joyously forward, making a great noise.

The King began to weep, and begged them to leave him his castle. "Take my daughter with you. You have earned her."

They put the castle back in its place, the shepherd stopped playing, and mountain and valley stood still. They took the King's daughter and departed, and each hero returned to his dwelling-place, and he who had pierced the steel shield with the steel spear took the maiden and came again to the King of the East. And the King of the East gave him his own daughter, whom the youth had long loved, for his wife. So he had two wives—one was the daughter of the King of the East, the other the daughter of the King of the West.

At night, when they lay down to sleep, he said: "Now, I have one sun on one side and another sun on the other side, and a bright star plays on my breast."

In the morning he sent for his parents and called also the King to him, and said, "Now, I will tell my dream." "What was it, then?" they all said. He answered: "I saw in my dream one sun on one side of me and another sun on the other, and a bright star played on my breast."

"Had you such a dream?" they asked.

"I swear I had such a dream."

And three apples fell from heaven: one for the story-teller, one for him who made him tell it, and one for the hearer.



DAVID OF SASSUN

NATIONAL EPOS OF ARMENIA

—

[*Translated by F. B. Collins, B.S.*]

DAVID OF SASSUN

STRONG and mighty was the Caliph of Bagdad;¹ he gathered together a host and marched against our Holy John the Baptist.² Hard he oppressed our people, and led many into captivity. Among the captives was a beautiful maiden, and the caliph made her his wife. In time she bore two sons, Sanassar and Abamelik. The father of these children was a heathen, but their mother was a worshipper of the cross,³ for the caliph had taken her from our people.

This same caliph again gathered together a host and fell upon our people. This time—I bow before thy holy miracle, O sainted John—this time our people pressed him sorely, and in his affliction he cried unto his idols: “May the gods save me from these people; bring me to my city safe and well, and both my sons will I sacrifice unto them.”

In Bagdad the mother lay sleeping, and she had a dream. She dreamed she had in each hand a lamp, and when their flames seemed ready to go out they flashed up brightly again. When morning came she told this dream to her sons, and said: “Last night holy St. John appeared to me in my dreams and said that your father was in great trouble and had vowed to sacrifice you. When he again comes home he will stab you: look to your safety.”

Both sons cried unto their gods, took food with them for their journey, put gold into their purses, and set out on their

¹ From the sense and according to the time in which the action takes place, Nineveh must be understood here; and instead of an Arabian caliph, the Assyrian king Sennacherib. There is an anachronism here, as the reader will see, for a king living 800 years before Christ is called an Arabian caliph, though the caliphs first took up their residence in Bagdad in the year 755.

² The reference here is to the famous monastery of St. John the Baptist, which was built by Gregory the Illumi-

nator during the fourth century, on the mountain of Kark, near the Euphrates, on a spot where heathen altars had previously stood. On certain days pious Armenians made annual pilgrimages to the place. Among them many poets and champions, who, with long fasts and many prayers, begged from the saint the gifts of song, strength, and courage. John the Baptist was regarded by the Armenians generally as the protector of the arts.

³ So the Armenians called Christians.

travels. Coming to a narrow valley they halted there. They saw a river, and in the distance a brook clove the river to mid-stream, then mingled with its waters and flowed onward with it.

And Sanassar said to Abamelik: "He who finds the source of this brook and builds him a dwelling there, his race shall also wax mighty."

The brothers rose with one will and followed the brook upstream. They found its spring and saw its waters flowing as from a small pipe, and they ran down with the brook and increased till they mixed with waters of the great river. Here the brothers halted and laid the foundations of their dwelling.

And Sanassar hunted while Abamelik worked on the house. Ten, yea, twenty days they worked on their dwelling. It happened that once Abamelik came upon Sanassar asleep, worn out with fatigue, his venison thrown away unroasted. Abamelik was much troubled at this, and said, "Rise, brother, and we will depart from this place. How long shall we stay here and eat meat without salt? If it were God's will that we should have happiness, in our father's wooden palace we should have found it." And they mounted their horses and rode to the Lord of Arsrom.⁴ Both came thither, presented themselves to him, and bowed before him.

Now both brothers were mighty men. They found favor with the Emir of Arsrom, and he asked them of their birth and of their tribe, and said, "What manner of men are you?"

Sanassar answered and said, "We are the sons of the Caliph of Bagdad."

"Hoho!" said the Emir, while terror seized him. "We feared you dead, and here we meet you living. We cannot take you in. Go whither ye will."

And Sanassar said to Abamelik, "Since we have run away from our father, why should we bear his name? From this day, when anyone asks us concerning ourselves, let us say we have neither father nor mother nor home nor country: then will people lodge us."

⁴The original name of this city is Theodosiopol. It was founded by the Greek commander Anato in the year 412 A.D. and named in honor of Emperor Theodosius II. Later it was

captured by the Sultan of Ikonika, who named it Arsi-Rom, "Land of the Greeks." The Armenians call it Karin, after the old Armenian province in which it lies.

Thence they rode to the Emir of Kars, who gave the lads the same answer. They turned and rode to the King of Kraput-Koch. The King of Kraput-Koch scrutinized the lads, and they found favor in his sight; and Abamelik presented himself to the King and bowed low before him. This pleased the King greatly, and he said: "My children, whither came ye? What have you? and what do you lack?"⁶

"We have neither father nor mother nor anyone beside," answered the brothers.

And it came to pass that Sanassar became the King's *tschubuktschi*⁶ and Abamelik his *haiwatschi*,⁷ and they lived at the King's house a long time.

But Sanassar said one day to Abamelik: "We fatigued ourselves greatly with labor, yet was our house not finished. To-morrow make the King no coffee, nor will I hand him his pipe. Let us not appear before him to-morrow."

When the King awoke, neither of them was near. He called the lads to him and said: "I asked you once if you had anyone belonging to you, either father or mother; and you said you had no one. Why, then, are you so sad?"

And the brothers said: "Live long, O King! In truth, we have neither father nor mother. Even if we hide it from you we cannot hide it from God. We worked a little on a dwelling, but left the work unfinished and came away." And they told the King everything as it was.

The heart of the King was grieved, and he said: "My children, if such is the case, to-morrow I will give you some court servants. Go and finish your house."

Then the King arose and gave them forty servants, skilful workers, and each had a mule and a bridle.

Early in the morning they arose and loaded the beasts with their tools, and the two brothers led them to the dwelling. They travelled on and at last reached the spring and the threshold of their house.

Now Sanassar said to Abamelik: "Brother, shall we build the house first or the huts for the servants? These poor wretches cannot camp out in the sun."

⁶ Southwest from the Sea of Wan lies a high mountain called Kraput-Koch ("Blue Ridge," from its blue color). Probably there was a dukedom or kingdom of Kraput-Koch which served as a city of refuge for the wandering As-

syrian princes. Perhaps the legend has preserved in the person of the King of Kraput-Koch the memory of the Armenian prince Skajordi.

⁶ Pipe-bearer.

⁷ The servant who prepares the coffee.

And they began first to make the huts. So strong was Abamelik that he built ten huts every day, while the others brought in wood for their building. In four days they finished forty huts, and then they set about building the house and finished it. They set up stone pillars in rows—so powerful were they—and laid a stone base under them, and the house was made ready.

Abamelik rode to the King of Kraput-Koch⁸ and said: "We are thy children. We have built our castle: it is finished, and we come to you and entreat you, 'Come and give our dwelling a name.' It pleased the King of Kraput-Koch that Abamelik had done this, and he said: "I rejoice that you have not forgotten me."

So the King gave Abamelik his daughter in marriage and made him his close friend. After the wedding the King and the young pair came together at the palace—and Uncle Toross⁹ was with them—and they mounted their horses and departed. Abamelik rode before them to point out the way. When they were approaching the castle the King suddenly turned his horse as if to ride back again, and said: "You have given your castle a name and have purposely brought me here to try me."

Abamelik said: "May your life be long, O master! Believe me, we have given the castle no name. We have but built it and made it ready."

"Very well. It may be that you have given it no name, but as you have set up rows of stone pillars let us call it Sausun or Sassun."¹⁰

Here they remained several days. Uncle Toross was also married and stayed at Sassun, but the King returned home.

And Abamelik was strong and became a mighty man. From the environs of the Black Mountain and the Peak of Zetzinak, from Upper Musch as far as Sechanssar and the Plains of Tschapachtschur,¹⁰ he reigned, and built a wall around his dominions. He made four gates. Often he shut

⁸ Probably the King's brother.

⁹ "Sassun" signifies "pillar upon pillar." This explains the origin of the name of Sassun, a district of the old Armenian province Achznik, south of the city of Musch. The residents of this district up to the present day owe

their independence to their inaccessible dwelling-place.

¹⁰ The names cited here exist to the present day. The places lie in the old districts of the Turuberan and Achznik in the present district Musch.

his doors, mounted his horse, and captured whatever came in his way, both demons and beasts of prey. Once he penetrated into Mösr and ravaged it, and he went in to the wife of the Lord of Mösr and lay with her. She bore a son, and the King of Mösr knew that the boy was Abamelik's and named him Mösramelik. But afterward Abamelik slew the King and took his wife and became King of Mösr.¹

Now Sanassar dwelt at Sassun, but the gods of his fathers gave him no repose, so he travelled to Bagdad to the home of his father and mother. His father, sitting at his window, saw his son Sanassar come riding up, and recognized him, and the caliph said: "My life to thee, great god! Thou hast brought back thy victim. Certainly in thy might thou wilt restore the second soon."

The mother—she was a Christian—began to weep and shed tears over her children. The father took a sharp sword and went out to meet his son, saying: "Come, my son, let us worship the great god in his temple. I must sacrifice to him."

The son said, "Dear father, your god is great and very wonderful. Truly in the night he permits us no rest. Certainly he will bring the second victim to you by force."

And they went into the temple of the god, and the son said: "Father dear, you know that we left your house when we were yet children, and we knew not the might of your god."

"Yes, yes, my son, but kneel before him and pray."

The son said: "What a wonderful god your god is! When you bowed before your god, there was a darkness before my eyes and I did not see how you did it. Bow once more before him, that I may learn to worship him."

When the father did the second time the son cried: "Bread and wine, the Lord liveth!" and seized his club and hurled the caliph full seven yards distant to the ground. And with his club he shattered all the images where they stood, put the silver in the skirts of his robe and carried it to his mother, saying: "Take this, mother, and wear it for ornament!"

His mother fell full length and bowed herself and said: "I thank thee, Creator of heaven and earth. It is well that thou hast rescued me from the hands of this cruel man."

¹ The Armenians now call Egypt Mösr. This probably refers to Mossul.

They found Sanassar a wife and placed him on the throne in his father's place, and he remained at Bagdad.²

Now Abamelik, who reigned in Mösr, left his son Mösramelik to rule in his stead and went to Sassun. Many years passed and children were born to him. To one he gave the name Tschentschchapokrik. The eldest son he named Zöranwegi, the second Zenow-Owan; while the third son was called Chor-Hussan,³ and the youngest David.

Of these, Tschentschchapokrik and Zöranwegi proved to be ne'er-do-weels. Zenow-Owan had such a voice that he dried seven buffalo hides in the sun and wound them round his body so that it should not rend him. But the cleverest of all was David, and to his strength words cannot do justice.

Abamelik's life was long, but old age came upon him. Once he sat sunk in thought and said to himself: "Enemies are all about me. Who will care for my children after my death? Mösramelik alone can do this, for none beside him can cope with my enemies."

He set out to visit Mösramelik,⁴ but he was very aged. "Mösramelik, my son," he said, "you are truly of my blood. If I die before you, I intrust my children to you. Take care of them. If you die first, confide yours to me and I will watch over them."

He returned and lived in his castle. His time came and he died. Then Mösramelik came and took the children to his house, for he had not forgotten his father's command. Sassun mourned the death of Abamelik for seven years. Then the peasants feasted and drank again with Uncle Toross, for they said: "Uncle Toross, our lads have grown old and our pretty girls are old women. If thou thinkest that by our seven years of weeping Abamelik will live again we would weep seven years longer." Uncle Toross gave the peasants their way, and said: "Marry your lads and maidens. Weeping leads nowhere."

And they sat down and feasted and drank wine. Uncle

² Here the story of Sanassar breaks off and he is not mentioned again in the tale.

³ All these names are poetic and refer to certain characteristics of their bearers. "Zenow-Owan" means "melodi-

ously-speaking John"; "Chor-Hussan" means "good singer"; "Tschentschchapokrik" means "sparrow"; and "Zöranwegi," "cowardly Wegi."

⁴ To Mossul.

Toross took a cup in his hand and paused: he was thinking about something, and he neither drank nor set the cup down. His son cries from the street: "Father, dear, there are the mad men of Sassun. Take care, they will be jeering at you. Let us go away."

Uncle Toross turned to his son and said: "Oh, you dog of a son! Shall I sit here and feast? Did not Mösramelik come and take our children away? Abamelik's children in trouble, and I sitting at a banquet? Oh, what a shame it is! Bread and wine, God be praised! Truly, I will drink no wine till I have fetched the little ones." And Uncle Toross went out of Sassun and came to Mösr. He greeted Mösramelik, and they sat down together. Said Uncle Toross: "Now, we are come for God's judgment. It is true that you made an agreement with Abamelik, but if a man sells a captive he should first wait on the lord."⁵

They arose and went to the court,⁶ and Uncle Toross was given the children.

But Mösramelik stood in fear of these children, and he said to Uncle Toross, "Let these children first pass under my sword, and then take them with you."

Uncle Toross told the lads of this, and Zöranwegi said, "Let us pass under his sword and escape hence"; and the other two said the same. But David said otherwise: "If he wishes us dead he will not kill us to-day, for the people will say he has murdered the children. Under his sword I will not go. He does this so that I shall not lift my sword against him when I am a man." Uncle Toross got the boys together, that they might pass under the sword of Mösramelik, for he was very anxious. David was rebellious; he stood still and went not under it. Uncle Toross seized his collar and pushed him, but David would not go. He ran past it at one side and kicked with his great toe upon a flint until the sparks flew. And Mösramelik was frightened and said: "This child is still so young and yet is terrible. What will happen when he is a man! If any evil comes to me it will be through him."

Uncle Toross took the children and came to Sassun. Zöran-

⁵ This means that if a captive is to be sold his kinsmen have a right before all others to redeem him.

⁶ Schariat, the name of the Turkish court of justice, stands in the original.

wegi he established in the castle in his father's place, but David, who was the youngest, was sent out to herd the calves.

What a boy David was! If he struck out at the calves with his oaken stick, he would throw them all down, and forty others beside. Once he drove the calves to the top of the mountain. He found a herdsman there who was abusing his calves, and said: "You fellow! What are you up to? Wait now, if I catch you, you will get something from my oaken stick that will make you cry Ow! ow!"

The fellow answered David: "I am ready to give my life for your head if I am not a shepherd from your father's village. These calves, here, belong to the peasants."

David said, "If that is so, watch my calves also. I know not what time I should drive them home. When the time comes tell me, that I may drive them in."

Then David drove in the calves on time that day, and Uncle Toross was pleased and said: "Always be punctual, my son; go out and come back every day at the right time."

"Uncle Toross, it was not my wisdom that did this. I have hired a comrade who will watch over my calves and see that I am ready with them."

Once his comrade tarried, and David was greatly vexed. It appeared that a religious festival was held in the village, and on this account the young man was detained. Finally he arrived, and David said to him, "To-day you get nothing from me."

The young man said: "David, I am willing to die for you. From fear of your anger, I waited not for the end of the service of God in the church, and not one spoonful of the holy soup⁷ has passed my lips. I drove out the calves and am here. Now you know why I tarried."

David said: "Wait here; I will bring you your dinner."

He set off with his oaken stick over his shoulder. He came to the village, and found that all the people had brought corn to the priests, who blessed it. David stuck his oaken stick

⁷ Although the Armenians became Christians in the fourth century, they still retain many heathen customs which have lost all their original significance. They still sacrifice sheep and cows which have on the previous evening

been given some salt consecrated by the priests. The meat is cooked in immense kettles and carried around to the houses. The shepherd speaks of soup of this kind.

through the handle of the four-handled kettle, and, full as it was, lifted it to his shoulder and walked away. The priests and the peasants wondered at it, and one cried, "Truly, he has carried off a kettle!"

A priest cried out, "For God's sake, be silent! It is one of those mad men of Sassun. Take care or he will come back and break our ribs for us. May he take the thing and fall down with it!"

And David took the kettle of grits to his comrade, whom he found weeping on the mountain.

"Ha, ha," said David, "I know why you weep. I have brought the grits, but have forgotten butter and salt. That is why you weep. Eat the grits now, and have salt and butter this evening."

But the youth said, "David, I am ready to die for you. What need have I of salt and butter; forty thieving Dews have come and driven away our calves."

David said, "Stay here and watch these calves, and I will bring back all the others"; and he went after the calves. He followed their tracks to the entrance of a cave and paused. He cried out with so loud a voice that the Dews were frightened, and were as full of fear as is the devil when Christ's voice is heard in hell.

And when the leader of the Dews heard the voice he said: "That is surely David, Abamelik's son. Go receive him with honor, else he will strike us dead."

They went out, one by one, and David struck each as he passed with his oaken cudgel, so that their heads fell off and only dead bodies remained in the place. He cut off the ears of all the forty and buried them under a stone at the mouth of the cave.

He laid down his club and entered the cave. There he saw a heap of gold and a heap of silver—indeed, all the treasures of the world. Since his father's death they had robbed and concealed their plunder in this cavern. He opened a door, and saw a steed standing fastened to a ring. David was sunk in thought, and said to himself: "Uncle dear, this property belongs to you, but this beast to me. If you give it to me—good. If not, you travel after those other fellows." Then he

answered for Uncle Toross: "My child, the treasure and the beast should belong to you. What shall I do with them?"

He looked around and saw upon a pyre a copper kettle with four handles, and in it were his forty calves. He stuck his oaken stick through the handles and raised the kettle, poured off the water, pushed the calves' feet back into the kettle, lifted it to his shoulder, and went back to his comrade.

The two drove the rest of the herd into the village, and David called the owners to him and said: "If you deceive my brother a hair's breadth in the reckoning it will go badly with you. Sell this kettle. May it repay you for your calves."

He separated his own calves from the peasants', and went home. It was then midday. He said to Uncle Toross: "Take quickly twenty asses and we will go out and bring back treasure that shall suffice you and your children till the seventh generation."

And they took the asses and set forth. When they reached the cavern, Uncle Toross saw the bodies of the Dews stretched near the entrance, and they were swelled up like hills. In great fright Uncle Toross loosed his ass from the others and fell back.

David said: "You destroyer! I fled not before them living, but you fear them dead! If you believe me not, turn back and raise this stone. I concealed all their ears there."

Uncle Toross came back and took the asses, and they went into the cave. They made a pack of all the treasure and carried it away with them. David said: "All this treasure belongs to you, but the steed is mine. If you will not give it to me, you shall follow after them."

He answered: "My child, the horse and the treasure too are yours. What should I do with it?"

Uncle Toross let David mount the steed. He gave him the spurs and he bucked to right and left. This was no ordinary steed—the difficulties of managing him cannot be described.

They returned to Sassun with the treasure. David procured a beautiful falcon and rode off to hunt. The calves he had long ago given over.

Once, as he hunted, he rode across the soil of a poor man, whose family numbered seven heads, and the man had seven beds of millet. Four beds he laid waste, and three remained.

Someone ran with the news to the old graybeard and said: "You are ruined. Go at once to your field, for before night he will destroy the other three beds."

The graybeard rose early and went out and saw his field was laid waste. He glanced about and saw David coming with a falcon on his hand. The graybeard cursed David and said: "Dost thou not fear God? Dost thou test thy strength on my grain-field? I have seven mouths to fill, and seven millet beds. Four thou hast destroyed, and three remain! If you are brave, go and get back your inheritance that extends from the summit of Mount Zözmak as far as Sechanssar. Mösramelik has taken it from you and draws wealth from it. Go and get it back. Why try your strength on me?"

But David answered: "Old man, curse me not. Here is a handful of gold—use it." And as he said it he killed his falcon.

David returned home and said: "Uncle Toross, go and bring me my father's staff and bow. I am going to make war, for others consume my inheritance and none of you have said anything about it to me."

Uncle Toross arose and demanded of Zöranwegi in David's name the staff and bow of Abamelik, but Zöranwegi refused it. David sent a second time, saying: "If you give it to me, good. If not, I will see to it that your head flies off and only your body remains."

Zöranwegi was frightened, and surrendered the bow and baton, and Uncle Toross brought them to David. And David fell asleep and dreamed. The next day he took forty calves and went to holy Maratuk,⁸ where he slaughtered the forty calves and bathed in their blood. Then he fell on his face and prayed and wept until God sent from heaven a sacred sign and a token. Even now the holy sign is to be found in Hawar at the house of Sork. David kissed the holy sign and put it under the right shoulder, and the token under the left.

Mösramelik knew that David, Abamelik's son, was come into manhood, and he gathered together a host to march against him. And he appointed a *holbaschi*,⁹ who prepared

⁸ Maratuk is a monastery built on a mountain of the same name.

⁹ This Turkish title shows that the legend has been altered at a late date.

his army and attacked David at Maratuk. He met on the march seven women, and said to them, "Sing and dance until I return," and they answered: "Why shall we dance and sing? We know not what we should say."

And Holbaschi sang for them:

"May the little women busy themselves grinding corn;
May the stout women help with the camel-loading;
For Holbaschi carries grim war to Sassun.
Strong yoke-oxen and red milch-cows he'll bring back
In the springtime; butter and Tochorton
Will be plentiful in the Land of Mösr."

Holbaschi saw the women begin dancing and singing, and started his host again and went to Maratuk and entered its gates. The daughter of the priest of Maratuk had often glanced slyly at David, and he was not indifferent to her. The priest's daughter went to David and said: "David, I am ready to die for you! Arise and see how many warriors are congregated in the courtyard."

When she had spoken she went out and closed all the gates from without. David stretched himself and cried: "Bread and wine, the Lord liveth!" and began to knock off the heads of the men of war. He beheaded them so that the bodies flew over the walls and the heads remained lying in the court. And he laid hold of Holbaschi, and tore out his teeth and drove them into his brow like nails. And he bent his lance till it curved like a dog's collar and put it around his neck. "Now," he said, "take yourself off and tell all to Mösramelik. If people still remain in his country let him herd them together before I come."

Holbaschi met the women a second time, and they were singing and dancing. And one of them sang:

"Holbaschi, dear Holbaschi, went hence like a cruel wolf.
Why come you back to us like a hunting dog?
Your lance lies on your neck like a dog's collar,
Thy mouth gapes like an open window,
And slime flows out like curdled milk from a skin;¹⁰
And whole caravans of flies buzz round it."

¹⁰ In Armenia, as is usual in the East, they make butter out of curdled milk; and for this reason the vessel is always covered with acum.

And Holbaschi sang:

"Oh, you shameless, worthless hussies,
I thought that Sassun was a free field.
Think not that only rocks and clefts opposed me.
There new-born children are fierce devils,
Their arrows like beams of the oil-mill;
And like windows they tear out the mouths of their enemies.
All the brave lads who went with me
Are fallen in Charaman.¹
In the spring its waters will bring you booty,
Then your butter and cheese can be made."

Now David armed himself and marched against Mösramelik. He found a great host assembled and encamped near Sechanssar.²

David said: "I promise thee not to give battle till I have eaten rice pillau in the green and red tent," and he urged his horse forward and appeared suddenly from the west in front of the tent. Great fright possessed the army when they perceived this rider, and Melik said, "What manner of man art thou?"

"I am the son of a western king, and I have come to help you."

Melik pitched a tent for him, and they ate together seven days. On the eighth day David mounted his horse, rode twice before Mösramelik's tent, and said: "Now, come out, I want to fight you. How long, Mösramelik, are you going to encroach upon my inheritance?" And David cried: "Bread and wine, God lives!" and fighting began on all sides.

Uncle Toross heard of the combat. He tore up a poplar by its roots, threw it across his shoulder, and set out. He halted at the upper end of the valley in which the fight was going on. If anyone crept away David shouted: "Dear Uncle Toross, chase him back into the valley and I will be ready for him!"

At last the army began to murmur: "Let them struggle hand to hand. He who overpowers the other has conquered."

Then said one of them. "Sit down, that I may slay you with my club," and the other said: "No, you sit down." At

¹ A valley near Musch.

² Literally, a table-like mountain.

last they agreed that David, being the youngest, should sit. So he put his shield over his head, laid under it the holy cross, and sat down. Mösrangelik made an onset from three leagues, burst upon him, and assailed him with a club, saying, "Earth thou art, be earth again!"

David said: "I believe in the high and holy cross of Maratuk. It is to me as if I were still eating rice pillau under the red and green tent."

Mösrangelik sprung upon him three times, struck him with his club, and said: "Earth thou art, be earth again!" and David replied only, "I believe in the high and holy cross of Maratuk."

Then came Mösrangelik's turn to sit down, and he was stubborn and would not. But the army reproached him and put his shield over his head, and he sat down. Then came Mösrangelik's mother, and began to ask mercy, saying: "David, I am ready to die for you! Is he not thy brother? Slay him not; have pity on him!"

"O shameless woman! When he struck me, thou saidst not, 'Is he not thy brother!' But, may your wish be granted! One blow I will give up for God's sake, the second for your sake, but the third belongs to me, and when I strike either he dies or lives!"

David rode back and forward again, and seizing his club hurled Mösrangelik seven yards deep into the earth. Then he ravaged Mösr and ascended the throne.

The Emir* of Kachiswan had a daughter, and her name was Chandud-Chanum.⁴ Chandud-Chanum heard of David's valor, and gave gifts to a bard and said to him: "Go, sing to David of my beauty, that he may come hither and we may love each other."

The bard went to Sassun, for he thought David was there. He came to Sassun and entered Zöranwegi's castle, thinking David lived in it, and sat down and began to sing to Zöranwegi. Zöranwegi cried: "Go. Club him and hunt him forth. He thinks to bring David hither by cunning!"

They set upon the singer, dragged him to the valley, and

* "Emir," in the eyes of the orientals, is almost the same as "king."

⁴ "Chandud" is a woman's name. "Chanum" means "lady."

threw him into the road. In the evening the shepherds returned on their oxen to the village. An ox became wild, and the herdsman fell off, and seeking the cause he found the bard, who wept and lamented and asked the herdsman:

"Which of the brothers lives in that castle?"

The shepherd answered: "Here lives Zöranwegi; yonder, in Mösr, David."

And the bard gave a piece of gold to the shepherds, and they gathered up the pieces of his broken tambur⁵ and pointed out his way to him. He went and sang of Chandud-Chanum's beauty before David. David rewarded him richly, and said, "Go before, I will come," and the singer went and told all to Chandud-Chanum.⁶

David departed straightway and went by way of Sassun and the Heights of Zözmak. He found a plough⁷ standing in his way. He freed the oxen, seized the plough-chain, mounted his horse, and dragged the plough down. And it fell from the summit of the Black Mountain plump into the aqueduct of the village of Marnik.

He drew on and perceived that a buffalo had got loose and run along the road and left its dung there. David looked at the dung and said: "If evil befalls me he is guilty of it who left the dung there; if not, it is also his work that it befalls me not."

From a side-path appeared a buffalo, and David had never seen the like before. He lifted his club to slay him when from the opposite side a shepherd came and began to scold the buffalo. David thought the shepherd was scolding him and said, "Fellow, what have I done to you that you rail at me?"

The shepherd answered: "Who are you? Ah, you are a Sassun brawler who has seen nothing of the world! I spoke to my buffalo."

"Don't be angry, youngster! It is a shame, indeed, that in my country I have never seen the like. Are there many such creatures in these parts?"

The shepherd said, "Come, and I will show you."

⁵ An instrument like a guitar.

⁶ The song in which the bard praises the beauty of Chandud-Chanum is wanting. A certain carelessness is seen generally in the rest of the narrative.

⁷ The Armenians use, in ploughing, a kind of plough which is drawn by from five to ten pairs of buffaloes or oxen.

And they went to the field of Ausut, where the peasants hitched their buffaloes and drove them. David found the buffaloes with tongues lolling from the heat as they drew the plough. David felt pity for them; he unhitched them and drove them to the pond.

The ploughman began to curse him, and he said: "Ploughman, curse me not; only give me the chain into my hand."

He seized the chain and began to draw; the ploughman guided the plough and David ploughed nine furrows. Then the shepherd said to David: "That is not thy strength. Leave thy horse and then draw. We shall see whether it is thine or thy horse's strength."

David left his horse and ploughed nine furrows alone.

The shepherd then said to David: "It is already noon. Come now and eat, then thou canst go on thy way!"

David answered: "No, I will ride on. Thy children want to eat, and if I come nothing will remain for them."

However, they sat down and when the dinner was set out David crumbled all the bread and the vessels all at once, and the shepherd said: "Here, hide yourselves or he will devour us also."

David said: "Surely, brother, he who drags the plough must eat bread. How could it be otherwise?"

And he went his way to the city where Chandud-Chanum dwelt.

David came to the gates of the castle where Chandud-Chanum lived—to the place where all her suitors came to woo. He saw a youth standing near the door with a club in his hand. David said: "Ha, my lad, what do they call you?"

"My name is Gorgis."

"Gorgis!" said David. "When I marry Chandud-Chanum you shall be godfather! Now, Godfather Gorgis, who is in the house?"

"Matchmakers from the giants—Schibikan of Chorassan and Hamsa of Lori."

David said, "Take my horse and fasten him." And he took his horse and tied him.

Then David asked: "What kind of a club have you? Show it me."

David took the club and threw it into the air with such force that it is whirring till this very day. Then he said, "Godfather Gorgis, let us go in and eat and drink."

They went in, and David sat down, for he was tired and hungry, and every matchmaker, one after the other, handed David a cup of wine. David lost patience and seized the wine-pitcher and emptied it in one draught, saying, "Now say only what is well for you!"

The wine made David drunk, and when he let his head fall the matchmakers drew their swords to strike him, but when he raised his head they concealed their swords. They began this again when Godfather Gorgis called out: "Think not that you are in Georgia! No, this is a dangerous country." And when David heard him he said, "Now stand bravely at the door!"

The matchmakers sprang up and as they ran each gave Gorgis a box on the ear and escaped. David then turned to Gorgis and said: "Where can I see Chandud-Chanum?"

"In the garden of the King," Gorgis answered. "To-day is Friday and she will be there. Before her walk twenty slaves, and twenty walk behind her. We will go to-day and see her there."

So Gorgis and David went thither and concealed themselves behind the garden wall and waited. The slaves passed by one after another, and, when Chandud-Chanum came, David put his arm around her neck and kissed her three times. Chandud-Chanum said not a word. He kissed her again. Chandud-Chanum seized him by the collar and threw him against the wall so that the blood gushed from his nose.

David was angry and was going to mount his horse. "Godfather Gorgis," he said, "lead out my horse. I will destroy the city and depart."

Gorgis began to plead: "I pray you, put it off till morning. It is dark now. At daybreak arise and destroy the city and depart."

David lay in bed and could not sleep from anger. "Would it were dawn that I might rise and destroy the city and get away from here," he thought to himself.

Chandud-Chanum was still walking in the garden. A lame slave came to her and said: "Thy walk will end sadly. Take care, David is going to destroy the city and depart."

She took the cloth in which her evening meal had been brought, and wrapped her head in it. She turned and went straightway into the castle where David was and knocked at his door.

David said: "What insolent people live here! They will not wait till morning, but say, 'Arise, destroy the city and be off!'"

Gorgis arose and looked out of the window and said, "These are women, not men," and they opened the door.

Chandud-Chanum came to David and said: "You kissed me first for the fatigue of your journey, a second time for yourself, and a third time for God's sake. Why did you kiss me a fourth time? You are the son of your father and I am the daughter of mine. It has been said: Take to yourself a wife that you may have a son who is like his uncle. Do you think you have brought me the heads of the giants Hamsa of Lori and Schibikan of Chorassan, that you kiss me a fourth time?"

David's heart softened and he said: "If that is so I will go out at daybreak and bring you their heads." Then he added: "Very well, I go; if they are stronger than I they will kill me. For God's sake come and seek my body. On the right hand I have a birth-mark—a cross—by that you shall know me. Bring my body back and bury it."

So David set out. The giants perceived a rider coming, for the dust from his horse's hoofs rose to heaven: "This rider comes to fight with us. Perhaps he is of the race of Sergo."⁸

They called to him, saying: "Ho, fellow! who are you, and whence come you? Do you know Chandud-Chanum? Will you take this ring to her?"

David said: "Certainly I know her, but I have come to take your heads to the Princess Chandud. I know nothing about your rings!"

The eyebrows of Schibikan of Chorassan hung down over his breast and he fastened them across his back. Hamsa of Lori had an underlip so long that it reached the ground and swept it.

⁸Sergo-Sarkus (Sergius) so the Kurds called the Christians, regarding them as descendants of St. Sergius, who is very

popular among the Armenians of Wan and Musch.

David and the giants began to hack and hew each other and they fought with clubs and bows until night. David cried: "I believe in the high and holy cross of Maratuk," and took his sword and cut both their heads off. He bound their hair together and hung them across his horse like saddle bags and their tongues furrowed the ground like a plough.

David rode away with their heads and had already traversed half the way when he saw approaching him, riding between heaven and earth, a rider, who called out to him! "Do you think you have conquered the giants Schibikan and Hamsa?" The rider sprang behind David and struck at him with a club. He crawled under the saddle and the club struck the stirrup and tore it loose, and it fell to the ground. David sprang out from under the saddle and cried: "Bread and wine, as the Lord liveth!" and swung his club over his enemy. The enemy dodged the blow, but his hair fell away from his face. David looked and recognized Chandud-Chanum; she had disguised herself and had come to meet him.

"O shameless woman!" David said. "You would disgrace me a second time."

They rode together into Chandud-Chanum's city. They arrived and dismounted and called Chandud-Chanum's father. David said to him: "Will you give me your daughter for a wife?"

Her father said: "I will not give her to you. If you will marry her and live here, I will give her to you. If you must take her away, I will not give her. How can I do otherwise? I have enemies all around me; they will destroy my city."

And David said: "I will marry her and stay here. I will not take her away."

So they were married and celebrated the wedding, feasting seven days and seven nights.

The time passed by unheeded, and when nine months, nine days and nine hours had passed, God sent them a son.

And David said to Chandud-Chanum: "If this child is mine, he must have a mark—he will show great strength." They put the child in swaddling-clothes, but instead of bands they bound him with plough-chains. He began to cry and stir in his cradle and the chain snapped into pieces.

They sent word to David: "The youngster is a stout fel-

low. He has broken the chains. But one of his hands seems hurt. He clenches his fist, and no one can open it."

David came and sat down, looked at the hand and opened it. In the hand he found a little lump of clotted blood. "The whole world is to him as a drop of blood, and he will hold it in his hand. If he lives he will do wonderful deeds."

Then they christened the boy and gave him the name of Mcher.

Time passed and the boy grew fast, and David left him in Kachiswan with his grandparents, and took Chandud-Chanum with him to Sassun. The men of Chlat⁹ heard David's coming and they assembled an army, built a rampart, formed their wagons into a fortress, and began to give battle. When Chandud-Chanum sent her lance against the wall she shattered it and the wagons flew seven leagues away. Then David went forward and drove the fighters away, saying to them: "Ye men of Chlat! what shameless people ye be! Ye wage war on women! Let me but take my wife to Sassun and I will come back, and we will fight it out.

But the men of Chlat believed him not. "Swear to us by the holy cross you carry; then we will believe you," said they.

David touched the token with his hand as he thought, but the cross was there and he knew it not, and the power of the cross was that no one could swear by it.

He took Chandud-Chanum to Sassun. Here he first knew that he had sworn on the cross, for he found the cross lying at his left shoulder where the token had been.

"Now it will go badly with me," said David. "Whether I go or whether I stay, it will go badly with me. And I must go."

He advanced, therefore, to give battle, and the men of Chlat pressed him sorely. His horse was caught in the reedy marsh of Tschechur.¹⁰ With difficulty he crawled out of the bog and reached the waters of the Lochur.¹

Once Abamelik had lingered at the house of Ibrahim Aga, and forcibly entered the sleeping-room of his wife. Her name

⁹The city of Chlat (Turkish "Achlat") lies northwest of the Sea of Wan. In olden times it was famous for its splendor, its high walls, and its citadel. The inhabitants had been injured

by David's father and wished to avenge themselves.

¹⁰A marsh at the outlet of the Kara-Su, a tributary of the Euphrates.

¹A small river which empties into the Sea of Wan not far from Chlat.

was Schemschen-Chanum. She had borne a daughter to Abamelik, who was now an ardent Mahometan. This daughter took up her bow and arrows and concealed herself on the sloping river-bank. When David bathed in the waters of Locher she shot him, assassin-like, with an arrow in the back. David arose and made a great outcry and his voice sounded even up to Sassun. Zönow-Owan, Chorassan, Uncle Toross, Tschöntsichchapokrik, and Zöranwegi came together, for they heard the voice of David. And Zönow-Owan called to him from Sassun, "We are coming."

And they went forth to help David, who heard in the water the voice of his kinsmen. They came to the river and found David, who said: "Zönow-Owan, she seemed frightened at our calling. Go and find her."

And they sought and found the blue-eyed maiden. David seized her by one foot, trod on the other, tore her in pieces, and threw her into the village at the foot of the mountain. From this deed he named the village Tschiw-tis-Tschapkis.² The village lies at the mouth of the Tschechur and is called Tschapkis to this day.

The brothers took David with them and moved on to Sassun. And after four days David died, and his brothers mourned for him. They went to Chandud-Chanum to console her and wish her long life; but Chandud-Chanum said, "Ah, me, after David's death I am but the subject of your scorn."

And Tschöntsichchapokrik said: "Chandud-Chanum, weep not, weep not. David is dead, but my head is still whole."

Chandud-Chanum climbed the tower and threw herself down. Her head struck a stone and made a hole in it, and into this hole the men of Sassun pour millet and grind as the people of Mösr do; and every traveller from Mösr stops there before the castle to see the stone.

The brothers came to see the body of Chandud-Chanum, and they pressed on her breasts and milk flowed therefrom. They said: "Surely she has a child! If there is a child it must be in Kachiswan."³ And they set out for Kachiswan and said to the governor: "A child of our brother and sister-in-law lives here. Where is it?"

² Literally, "I will tear in pieces and scatter."

³ The small city of Kagisman, not far from Kara.

"It is not here."

"We have a sign. In the breast of our sister-in-law was milk."

Then the governor said: "She had a daughter, but it is dead."

"We have a test for that also—for our dead. The grave of one dead one year is one step long, of one dead two years, two steps long, and so on."

They went to the church-yard and found not a single grave which stood their test.

Zönow-Owan said: "Bind leather bands about me. I will cry out."

The truth was, they had dug a cellar for Mcher underground, and hid him there and watched over him.

The brothers bound Zönow-Owan about the body and he cried out. Mcher knew his voice and would have gone to him, but his grandmother said to him: "That is not the voice of thy kinsman. It is the noise of children and the beating of drums."

When Mcher heard the voice for the third time he beat down the door and went out. One door destroyed the other. By a blow of his fist he sent the first door against the second, the second against the third, and so all seven doors were shattered.

Mcher saw his uncles from afar, but his father was not there. He asked, and his uncle told him the men of Chlat had slain his father. He fell upon his face and wept, and as he lay there his uncles wished to lift him, but exert themselves as they would they could not move him.

The tears of Mcher furrowed the earth and flowed like a river. After three days he arose, mounted his father's horse, and rode to Chlat. He circled the town and destroyed it—as it is even to this day. Then he ascended the mountain Memrut⁴ and saw the smoke of the ruins grow ever denser. Only one old woman remained alive. He seized her, and, bending two trees down, bound her feet to the trees and let them loose. And thus he killed her. Since then no smoke ascends from Chlat.

⁴A high mountain not far from Chlat northwest of the Sea of Wan. Many interesting legends about it exist. Haik,

the ancestor of the Armenian Nimrod, is said to be buried here.



APPLES OF IMMORTALITY

Folktales of Armenia

LEON SURMELIAN

ILLUSTRATED BY STEWART IRWIN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY AND LOS ANGELES · 1968

This material is presented solely for non-commercial educational/research purposes.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1968

The book is copyright under the Berne Convention. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, 1956, no portion may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Inquiries should be made to the publishers

© Leon Surmelian, 1968

SBN 40 398001 5

UNESCO COLLECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

SERIES OF TRANSLATIONS FROM THE
LITERATURE OF THE UNION OF SOVIET
SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

The translation of these folktales from the Armenian has been accepted
in the series of translations sponsored by the United Nations
Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
in consultation with the Commission of the USSR for UNESCO
and the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
BERKELEY AND LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 68-12420

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

FOREWORD

The life of a people during various periods of its history, its psychological and spiritual structure, its ethics and esthetics, its hopes and aspirations are reflected in their true native colour and in their essential features in the folktale. And despite similarities in subject-matter and motifs we can readily recognize the character of a whole nation through its folktales.

There are several collections of Armenian folktales published for scholars or for popular reading; we have literary versions of our folktales; our folktales have been translated into various languages—Russian, Rumanian, Hungarian, Czech, etc. *Apples of Immortality: Folktales of Armenia* by Leon Surmelian occupies a place of special importance compared to other translations. Its scope is wider; it excels in the choice and variety of its tales. Surmelian undertook a difficult task and successfully met the challenge. He has made a profound study of Armenian folktales and gained a deep understanding of them; he has penetrated to the very core of our national heritage in this genre. He has used, when necessary, different variants of a folktale and woven them together in a masterful manner, meanwhile making no changes of his own, adding nothing of his own. The tales in this volume are authentic. Surmelian is opposed to alterations in a folktale, to anything that would reduce its authenticity and make it less genuine, or spurious, and he is right in his insistence that we should have only accurate texts.

In translating these tales Surmelian has made every effort to preserve their Armenian colour and flavour, their special or unique qualities, and to make them at the same time easily comprehensible to the English-speaking reader. The Introduction and Notes give background information about Armenia and the life and customs of our people.

Leon Surmelian hopes to reach the general reader, to make this a book of wide popular appeal, and one to be enjoyed particularly by young people, but his work is actually much broader and much more ambitious in scope. After rendering Armenia's folk epic, *Daredevils of Sassoun*, in English, Leon Surmelian now presents to English-speaking nations, and one might say the peoples of the world, these pearls of Armenian folk

Foreword

literature in a companion volume, and what he has done in this new book is a noble work of great merit, worthy of high praise.

Artashes Nazinian

**Director, Folklore Section, Institute of
Ethnography and Archeology, Armenian Academy of
Sciences**

Erevan

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	page 7
----------	--------

INTRODUCTION	11
--------------	----

Wonder Tales

1	Apples of Immortality	41
2	The Swineherd	53
3	Rose-Maiden	65
4	Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks	75
5	Magic Candlestick	92
6	The Bird-Peri	97
7	Jan-Polad : Steel-Monster	107
8	The Red Cow	115
9	The Peasant's Son and the Forty Robbers	120
10	Zulvisia	130
11	Tale of the Laughing Fish	140
12	The Woodcutter	148
13	Tale of the Hunter's Son	156
14	Sun-Maid and Dragon-Prince	166
15	Alo-Dino and the Nightingale of a Thousand Songs, Hazaran Bulbul	173
16	Brother-Lamb	186
17	Tale of a Boy's Dream	192
18	Tale of the Wizard	199
19	Faithful Wife	205
20	The Boy Who Did Not Want to Die	211
21	Tale of the One-Eyed Giant	216
22	The Fox, the Wolf, the Bear, and the Emerald-Bird	221

Contents

23	Shrewish Wife	page 225
24	Habermayn, the Serpent-Prince	229

Tales of Everyday Life

25	Halva Vendor	251
26	Slandered Sister	257
27	There are Women and There are Women	265
28	The King's Rose	268
29	Wise Weaver	271
30	The Goat	273
31	The Old Hag	277
32	The Lame Man, The Beardless Man, and the One-Eyed Man	280
33	Clever Bride	285
34	A Man Must Stretch His Legs to Fit His Quilt	286
35	The Liar	287
36	Death of Little Kikos	288
37	Three Brothers	291
38	The Man Who Knew How to Divide a Chicken	293
39	Mighty Dezhiko	295
40	Father Slik Goes to Paradise	299
	Notes	303

INTRODUCTION

The folktales in this collection have been taken down from the lips of unlettered peasants in the highlands of Armenia, notably in the villages around Mt Ararat. As an Armenian boy I grew up with these tales. Today I look upon them as an American writer and teacher of literature, and I can't help wondering: aren't these *Hekiatner*, as Armenians call their popular tales, among the more beautiful and entertaining folktales we have in any language? Aren't they as good as the immortal *Household Tales* of the Grimm brothers, and perhaps even better? The discriminating reader must decide for himself whether the evidence presented in this volume justifies such enthusiasm.

We may divide the folktales of Armenia into wonder tales (Part I) and realistic tales of everyday life (Part II), although this is a rough distinction at best, for there are wonder tales with realistic elements in them, and realistic tales not altogether devoid of the marvellous. The classic tale of course is the wonder tale, or fairy tale, with or without fairies, and these are the tales I liked best as an Armenian boy. And the longer the tale the better I liked it. The complications, the difficulties to be overcome before the wedding was celebrated for seven days and seven nights added to the thrill of listening to them. What impressed me most about our *hekiatner* when I first heard them as a child was their strange luminous beauty. And today as I look upon them with a more sober and critical eye I see that I was not, perhaps, far wrong, that beauty might well be the chief merit of these wonder tales, and it is enough.

My paternal grandmother in Trebizond, Nené (nanny), could not read and write. She was still straight and spry at eighty-five, and she spent most of the day sitting crosslegged on a thin mattress by the iron stove in our living room, which was her corner, fingering her prayer beads. She knew that *peris*, or *houriperis*, which are our fairies, and 'better than us', as she said, *kantz mez aghék*, frolicked and danced and bathed in the pool of a certain spring almost every night, and disappeared at day-break. I do not know whether Nené ever saw *peris* with her own eyes, but she knew of their doings, and she said her own grandmother used to watch *peris* every night from the windows of her house overlooking the Big Spring. I was in love with these ravishing maidens whose long golden

Apples of Immortality

hair reached down to their ankles, Nené told me, and who lived forever, she said, and were not mortals like us.

When my grandmother saw that pinching me on the arm for my noisy mischiefs would do no good and my mother was not able to catch me as she chased me from room to room, to thrash me with her slipper, my grandmother agreed to tell me another tale about *peris* and *devs*, or giant monsters. And instantly, I quieted down and sat on the carpet beside Nené, and I was carried away to another world, where the youngest despised brother cut his finger with his pocket-knife and sprinkled salt on the wound to stay awake at night while guarding the Apple-Tree of Immortality in the king's garden. Or, riding a fiery horse, and slaying one giant monster after another, he caught the magic nightingale of a thousand songs, Hazaran-Bulbul. These fiery horses of Armenia flew through space and time, and I have been riding them ever since.

I envied my older brother Onnik and sister Nevard for sleeping in the same room with our maiden aunt, Azniv, who told them even more marvellous tales than did Nené before they went to sleep. Sometimes Onnik and Nevard consented to repeat these tales for me in the morning. I was excluded from their bedroom, where golden apples fell almost every night, pomegranates were full of pearls and rubies, and doves threw off their feather-dress and became lovely maidens. I slept in another room with my younger sister Yevgin (Eugenia), feeling neglected by my parents, and always identifying myself with the youngest brother who won in the end.

The forty tales in this volume, three of them short anecdotes, are taken from *Armenian Folk Tales*, (*Hai Zhoghovertakan Hekiatner*), published in Erevan by the Armenian Academy of Sciences, in 1959-67. This is the first comprehensive and scholarly edition of our folktales. Six volumes have appeared so far, with Artashes Nazinian, director of the Folklore Section of the Institute of Ethnography and Archeology of the Armenian Academy of Sciences, acting as general editor. Other specialists on the editorial board are: Doctor-Professor B. N. Arakelian, Academician Karapet Melik-Ohanjanian, Doctor-Professor Gourgen Hovnan, Corresponding Member of the Academy A. T. Ghanalanian. The publication of these six volumes, to be followed by fourteen more, including tales from all regions of historic Armenia and from the Armenian Diaspora is, perhaps, even more important than the publication of fifty known variants of the Armenian national epic, *Daredevils of Sassoun*, by the Armenian Academy of Sciences. I have chosen a few tales also from Garegin Servantsian's *Hamov-Hotov*, 'Tasty-Fragrant', first published in

Introduction

Istanbul in 1884, reprinted in Tiflis in 1904, in Paris in 1949; and from *Armenian Folk Tales*, Erevan, 1950, edited by A. T. Ghanalanian.

Garegin Servantsian (1840–92), was born in Van and ordained a bishop while he taught school in Trebizond and served as the prelate of the Armenian community. He rediscovered the Armenian national epic, forgotten by educated Armenians but remembered by illiterate peasants, and wrote down the first variant of it. I have already spoken at some length about Servantsian as a pioneer in Armenian folklore in my introduction to *Daredevils of Sassoun* (the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works). I chose these tales by Servantsian because he did not write them in literary Armenian but in the dialect of the peasants who told him the tales, and evidently as they told him. The bishop, a modest man of letters, presented them to his readers as raw materials to be reworked later by literary artists.

Such an artist was Hovhannes Toumanian (1869–1923). Born in Lori, the son of a village priest, Toumanian specialized in tales of everyday life, many of which he first heard from his own mother. I read Toumanian's tales as a schoolboy, in illustrated editions. Good as they are, they are literary treatments of our folktales by a popular modern poet. For this volume I prefer Servantsian's somewhat crude 'Dezhiko' to Toumanian's 'Brave Nazar', which is the same tale under a different title, and far better known than 'Dezhiko'. Toumanian studied some fifty variants of this widely distributed tale, several of them in various Caucasian languages, before writing his famous story, and 'Brave Nazar' contains a few episodes not found in 'Dezhiko'.

The next great collector after Servantsian was Sargis Haikouni (1838–1908), born in Trebizond, and a teacher in the seminary at Echmiadzin, where vardapets, or doctors of the church, are trained. Next came Tigran Navasardianz (1861–1927), born in Echmiadzin. Navasardianz lived like a 'dervish' and walked from village to village to collect his precious tales, being too poor to hire a carriage or ride on horseback. Indeed, in those days all the Armenian collectors lived in holy poverty as school teachers or monks.

The last of the great four was Ervand Lalayan (1864–1931), born in Alexandropol. Lalayan put the collection of our folktales on a scientific basis. His predecessors were practical dedicated philologists in the field. Lalayan, after graduating from Nersesian College in Tiflis, then the cultural and administrative centre of eastern Armenians, studied in Geneva, Vienna, and Paris, and he too had to teach school. He founded and edited the important *Ethnographic Review*, and as the leader of the Armenian

Apples of Immortality

Ethnographic Society he organized folklore expeditions in various parts of Armenia and in surrounding areas where Armenians lived. At his death Lalayan left behind him a vast amount of ethnographic material, including 1,000 folktales.

The collection of folktales (and folksongs) was part of a patriotic movement to save the Armenian nation, divided between two rival empires, from extinction, and to give it a new dignity and pride. The tales in this volume are mostly from eastern Armenia, where people on the whole enjoyed physical security, but were threatened with eventual Russification. It was not very safe to collect folktales in western Armenia, the major portion under Turkish rule, where 'Armenia' was a forbidden word, and where we were threatened by genocide.

This movement for national survival coincided with the rise of the romantic spirit in western Europe, and western Europe, particularly France, was the spiritual fatherland of Armenian writers and intellectuals. Despite its political mistakes Armenian romanticism in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth was a progressive movement that brought about a literary renaissance and consolidated the divided nation on both sides of the Russo-Turkish frontier as one ethnic and cultural entity. It was a daring uprising and tried to bring Armenia back into the main stream of world culture. Armenians longed with their romantic poets for their religious, cultural, and perhaps even their eventual political reunion with Europe, so that at last they too could live as free men. And the only Christian power next door to us was Tsarist Russia, which with all her short-comings, was still Europe to us. From the days of Peter the Great onwards, Armenians did everything in their power to aid the Russian conquest of the Caucasus. Eventual Russification did not frighten Armenians under Persian or Turkish rule. Their immediate problem was security of life and property.

Poets have led the Armenian nation from one disaster to another, and from one triumph to another. Romanticism is rooted deeply in the Armenian soul. And because of their romantic temper and their *dzour* 'twisted' minds Armenians are born rebels and hard to govern. Romantic, *dzour* Armenia is the Don Quixote of nations, a melancholy knight-errant, not discouraged by the disparity between the ideal and the real, driven by the Armenian dream of freedom, which after all is the dream of men everywhere. The past and the present, reality and phantasy, myth and fact are so mixed in the consciousness of the Armenian that it is impossible to separate them.

No nation worthy of the name can renounce itself and deny its own

Introduction

identity, and the history of Armenia is a record of survival against all odds. And if Armenia has endured it is because the poet wins in the history of nations. There is no power on earth that can still the poet's voice. And Armenian poets have now been writing and speaking their pieces for more than two thousand years.

We have in *Apples of Immortality* some representative samples of Armenian village poetry in the oral tradition. These are the artless creations of our village romanticists—artless, but not inartistic. Oral poetry, like written poetry, requires a poetic mind, and it has its masters in Armenia too. The tellers of these tales are our village poets. Most of them remain unknown, and are to be honoured more for that reason, like unknown soldiers.

The folktale is a form of popular fiction in prose, the oldest we have, and to understand these Armenian tales in all their nuances and implications one should read them—and translate them—as village poetry. The translation of Armenian folktales as they are actually told in Armenia, requires a knowledge of various regional or village dialects. Without such knowledge it is impossible to render them in another language. And I believe the translator himself should be an Armenian poet. Only the poet can do the job.

The wonder tale charms us by the bold beauty of its fantasy in country after country, and is likely to have an international plot. Armenian wonder tales are true to type, variations on universal themes in the spiritual history of man. But something of the native soil clings to them, and a few, no doubt, are indigenous to Armenia. We see in these tales the village imagination at work in novel combinations. Perhaps not even a fine lyric poem excels a fine fairy tale in the felicity of its conception, the unforgettable images it arouses in us, and the moods it engenders. A wonder tale can be a work of art, perfected by countless narrators. In this genre we must concede the superiority of collective art.

The collectors I just mentioned, and others who worked with them, noted with dismay the large infusion of Persian and Turkish words into Armenian peasant speech, but they faithfully wrote down these alien words too, meanwhile rigorously excluding Armenian literary words an unschooled narrator would not use. Occasionally a narrator uses a literary word or expression in the wrong way, unconsciously; or in an effort to appear 'educated'. And in the eastern sector there are also many Russian words in popular speech, but these are fairly recent acquisitions. Most Armenian dialects are not pure, and population movements have

Apples of Immortality

caused a hodge-podge of dialects in various parts of the country which the collectors tried to disentangle.

Despite such mixtures the language of these folktales is simple, sober, concrete, economical. There are no abstract or bookish words in them, and such words have been excluded in this translation. The collectors, as I said, were philologists in the field, and their very preoccupation with varieties of spoken speech, with matters of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, preserved the tales in their original *oral* form, which today is our best guarantee of their authenticity.

In general the style is not as calm and impersonal as in the national epic, but it is still essentially impersonal language; hence the paucity of adjectives and adverbs, which would reveal the attitude of the narrator and make the language more personal and subjective than it should be. It is a typical folktale style with its formulas. 'No snake on its belly dares crawl into this place, no bird on the wing dares fly over it.' A beautiful maiden says to the sun: 'Stand back, and let me come out and shine in your stead.' And a man can gaze at her 'for seven days and seven nights without eating and drinking and just feasting his eyes upon her wondrous beauty'.

We are scarcely aware of the narrator's presence until we reach the concluding words at the end of the tale. 'They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish. Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.' There are some minor variations in this formula. We have moralistic tales ('The King's Rose') but in the wonder tale the moral is not overtly stated, and the narrator does not comment on the action. The listener is the judge, and gets an extra apple for heeding the narrator's words in an allegorical tale that means more than it says. In all tales the good always triumphs, with kindness, justice, gratitude, modesty rewarded; envy, greed, treachery, cruelty, pride punished. The usual form of punishment (another formula) is to drag the guilty from the tail of a wild mule.

What matters is the plot, and there is no heightening of the event through language. The narrator suits the word to the action. The word depends on the action and not the action on the word. Sometimes one yearns to put an adjective here, an adverb there; to round out and complete a sentence or thought. I have resisted such temptations. This primitive peasant style is not, however, the result of poverty in language. Armenian is rich in its vocabulary and expressive devices. It is a flexible, subtle, sophisticated Indo-European tongue. There are more than 120,000

Introduction

words in the dictionary compiled by Stephan Malkhasianz, the best Armenian dictionary we have today, but by no means complete. A new dictionary is in preparation and will soon be published.

We find some interesting differences in the individual styles of Armenian narrators, particularly of the more gifted ones with strong unique personalities. They do not repeat mechanically what they have heard. They recreate the tale, as it were. After I had translated 'Apples of Immortality', the first tale in this volume, written down by Tigran Navasardianz in the Araratian dialect probably in 1876-1882, I received the fifth volume of *Armenian Folk Tales*, which opens with a close variant of this same tale, 'Golden Apple', told by a woman in Mountainous Karabagh and written down in shorthand in 1922 by Margarit Grigorian in the Karabagh dialect. The narrator was born in 1856 and died in 1928 in her native Shoushi.

'Although she was illiterate,' the collector tells us, 'she was a talented woman with a keen mind, an excellent memory, and a good command of language. She was proud, courteous, thoughtful and kind, a lover of things beautiful, with refined tastes. After the death of her two brothers by cholera she never married and lived in the paternal home all her life. The salubrious mountain air of Karabagh had preserved her health and beauty. She had a fair complexion, with rosy cheeks and blue eyes. She not only told tales, but taught folk songs, rhymes and riddles to young girls in her neighbourhood, and enjoyed the respect of all, a respect bordering on awe. She used snuff, but she was so clean and fastidious that you hardly noticed it. As she grew older she was inclined to be silent and withdrawn, and sitting crosslegged on a carpet she sang her favourite songs while knitting socks. She never complained, she never asked for help, though desperately poor when I met her.'

These men and women narrators are village 'characters', and some of them are rhapsodes, with a touch of genius or 'madness' in their make-up. They are not ordinary peasants, but folk artists. The language of this gifted woman in Mountainous Karabagh is more emotional, more colourful and poetic than of the unknown narrator in the earlier variant I had chosen, which nevertheless I consider the better story. I used some of her descriptive details of the king's garden and a few other significant items in order to give a more complete and vivid version of this very popular tale.

Variants can be illuminating. And they are important. Significant details missing in one variant may be found in another, and we can see in variants regional and individual differences of style. There is something

Apples of Immortality

of Mountainous Karabagh ('Black Garden') in the description of the king's garden in the 'Golden Apple'. The summer nights bright with stars and the Milky Way, the cooling mountain breezes, fragrant with apple blossoms, the variety of birds and flowers and other details show the narrator's love for her native province. Karabagh is well-known for its towering mountains and wooded valleys, its orchards and ice-cold springs, its alpine pastures, its ancient Armenian monasteries and colleges—and this woman was passionately attached to Mountainous Karabagh, where people live the longest—when allowed to live. In Karabagh you can meet men and women who are still active at 110, 120, 130 years of age, and a few are said to be 150. For these Armenians Apples of Immortality have more than a symbolic meaning.

When I have added details from another variant, even if only a few words or sentences, I have mentioned the other variant in the Notes at the end of this book. My basic principle has been not to add anything of my own, to stay with the original village texts. I do not care for literary treatments of folktales; I want the genuine article. To invent an incident or conversation and even a minor descriptive detail or a brief transition might falsify the tale, for a folktale is a delicate thing and a slight change might ruin it. These are not then literary versions of our folktales but the original village texts in various dialects of Armenia. In a responsible English translation the language too must be faithful to the original. I am indebted to Artashes Nazinian and his associates, Khachik Dashtents, Armenian translator of Shakespeare, and Arus Thadeosyan, for critical readings of my manuscript. Arus Thadeosyan patiently checked every word in these forty tales with the original village texts.

I would not have undertaken this difficult task—which has been a labour of love—if I were not convinced from the beginning that these popular tales of Armenia, virtually unknown in English-speaking countries, are so good that all they need is a little trimming and stitching to make them comprehensible to the non-Armenian reader. I approached them not as a professional folklorist, which I am not, but as an Armenian poet and as a literary specialist.

We find in these tales revealing recreations of significant experience wholly at the imaginative level or in everyday life, and they glow with living pictures. In these symbolic actions the event is not only acted out by the characters, but talked out, and sometimes the characters talk to themselves and we know what they are thinking. We have in these tales object lessons in narrative techniques that go back we know not to what

Introduction

misty or mystic period and region in antiquity. India? Egypt? Babylon? Urartu? The Hittites? Persia? Asia Minor before Armenia and before Homer? We wonder. Affinities with Greek folklore are stronger in the western part, where Greeks and Armenians have lived together or as next-door neighbours for thousands of years; and with Persian folklore in the eastern part, which at various periods has been under Persian rule. Alexander H. Krappe is undoubtedly right when he says Armenian folklore is part of European folklore.

The village texts are not tape-recordings. We may be sure that the collector, even when he wrote the tale down in shorthand, did some selecting, editing, and recasting before publication, or before the final draft of the manuscript. When we look at the manuscripts that have reached us—many are lost—we see minute, careful revisions in them; generally for making the dialect more authentic—the main preoccupation of Armenian collectors in their fervour for philological accuracy. But I suspect story values were not neglected. Evidently the collectors themselves were skillful story-tellers. I am impressed by the craftsmanship of these village texts. It seems almost incredible that an illiterate peasant—even when edited by a provincial school teacher—can tell a story with such artistic economy and in such lively pictorial language, without getting lost in irrelevant details. These tales would go flat if told in prosaic prose. A learned or bookish style would be fatal.

The narrator does not use a common everyday language, he deviates almost imperceptibly from normal speech and in this deviation lies his stylistic distinction. And that is also the secret of the characteristic style of Armenian folktales. The narrator needs a prodigious memory to remember a tale in all its essentials after hearing it once or twice from an old-timer who entertained villagers gathered around the *tonir*, a well-like oven for cooking and for baking the flat loaves or large thin sheets of Armenian bread, the best bread in the world. But the teller, if he is good, is a creative narrator, and improvisation cannot be ruled out of these tales. The tale in some way expresses the narrator's own personality. He may add and delete as he goes along, although after many repetitions the variations are probably slight. The basic story is not likely to change, this is a hardy genre, with indestructible motifs.

The peasant speech of Armenia has some interesting parallels in colloquial English. *Mam, mama, dad, pap, papy, nany*—these are Armenian words. We like diminutives: *mamik, papik*. The Armenian says 'king's son', 'king's daughter', 'you are mine and I am thine'—and we find

exactly these same expressions in the tales of the Grimm brothers, for instance.

Armenian peasant speech can be as terse as the best English prose. Terse and brisk: this is the characteristic style of these village poets, and considering the fast-moving action and the preponderance of dialogue it has to be fast staccato language. Compare, for instance, 'The Swineherd' in this volume with 'The Swineherd' of Hans Christian Anderson. It is, I believe, a better tale than Anderson's, with a different plot, and told with greater economy and verve by an illiterate fifty-five year old peasant. It is totally scenic, while Anderson's tale is told largely in summary.

Scenic style is different from summary style. In the scene characters are talking; in summary the author or the narrator is talking. The instinctive dramatic method of narration we see in these villagers is not only excellent poetics by Aristotelian standards, but it makes also for dramatic language with higher mimetic content. The scene, acted out by the characters in the tale, makes it a more interesting and believable event and draws the listener at once into the action. Such emotional involvement of the listener or reader would be difficult to secure by summary.

This dramatic or scenic method brings the events and characters closer to the listener and the tale tingles with life. The narrator does not say 'three months passed', but 'a month, two months, three months passed'. The lapse of time is not summarized at once, it is stretched out, as it were. The traveller goes on and on, and heaven only knows how far he goes to reach Ispahan or Aleppo or Chin-ma-Chin, which is China more as a mythical land of wonders and mystery than China in a geographic sense. These villagers show it and do not merely tell us about it. And in the Armenian tale, plot controls the language, as it should.

We note that when the characters talk the narrator simply says 'said,' and says it often. There is something of Hemingway, as it were, in this spare economical style with its 'saids' and the consistently scenic method with direct dialogue. Since a dramatic subject lends itself to scenic treatment it is likely to have incidents that can be shown and acted out, and they are shown and acted out in the Armenian tale. Their scenes are not cluttered up with comment and information as in the tales by Hans Christian Anderson, for instance, and the story is free of those elements that do not quite belong to it.

The clear lucid images of the action in the Armenian folktale reveal the whole wondrous life behind it. And the short sharp sentences contribute to the speedup of the story. The scene makes for suspense, it is an

Introduction

event still in progress and neither the hero nor listener knows the outcome. A retrospective narration in summary form and throwing the action farther back in time is not the method of the Armenian folktale, in which the action is brought close to the listener and made immediate and spontaneous. Both in style and structure these tales are amazingly modern.

The hero above all must be brave. The heroine embodies the virtues of Armenian womanhood: modesty, affection, loyalty to her man, kind even to a snake—and the snake, as might be expected, suddenly sheds its skin and becomes a handsome prince. The heroine can be a warrior in her own right. In marriage tests she helps her lover and sides with him against her father. An old woman can be helpful, but more often she is a wicked scheming servant without scruples who will do anything for gold: an old hag or a witch. Old men are exempt from this prejudice. We find them at cross-roads, giving advice and directions to travellers, and God himself may appear in the guise of an old man.

The merchant travelling with his caravan may rank next to the king and his chamberlain. The merchant is an adventurous romantic figure among Armenians. The craftsman, weaver, goldsmith, tailor, etc., figures rather prominently, and this too might be expected in a land with a numerous class of skilled artisans. The woodcutter is a humble character and may realize a poor peasant's most extravagant dreams and live in a mansion built of gold bricks and studded with gems and rising even higher than the king's palace. The executioner's sword hangs on every head, young or old. Even the chamberlain or the vizier is at the mercy of a capricious king, who has the power of life or death over all his subjects; but the king often rewards the good and taking off his crown puts it on a youthful head he threatened to chop off. The kings in these tales live very much like their own subjects, in close daily contact with them, hearing complaints, receiving a fish or a chicken, or a lustrous hide as a gift from some subject—and dispensing justice with the executioner's sword.

The dervish, a standard character in Turkish, Persian and Arabic tales, is found also in Armenian tales, although there are no Armenian dervishes. I dreaded dervishes. Islam struck terror in my young Christian heart when one of these ragged barefoot fellows with long black hair, begging for alms with his tin bowl cried 'Yahoo!' in the streets. In our folktales the dervish is a mysterious wanderer. Sometimes a holy man, and sometimes a rather terrifying figure. The greatest liar, the quack doctor, the unfaithful wanton queen, the giant shepherd with a single

eye in the centre of his forehead—these are among the *dramatis personae* of the Armenian tale. And it is full of discoveries or recognitions and of reversals.

Contrasting characters, king vs. beggar or shepherd, chamberlain vs. a hunter's or ploughman's son, add to the dramatic interest of the tale. Grateful or faithful animals help the hero attain his wish, and the most popular animal characters are the horse, the snake and the fox. There is the fabulous Emerald-Bird, a gigantic vulture that flies from the lower world to the upper world and carries the hero on its back. There are some strange unnamed beasts whose lustrous hides light up the woods on Mt Ararat or a whole city.

The realistic tales of everyday life are more local, more distinctly Armenian or Near Eastern in subject matter, and for that reason some readers might prefer them to the wonder tales, which remain my favourites. Realistic tales are even more numerous than wonder tales. Generally these are short stories without devils and perils, and the king's youngest son is missing in them. They give us an insight into the ways of Armenian folk, the joys, dreams, miseries, the wit and humour of the people in what was a feudal order up to fairly recent times. These tales of everyday life, like the wonder tales, have a happy ending. Armenians are optimistic folk, and in the realistic tale the hero is a folk figure representing the poor and downtrodden in their dealings with kings or city sharps. When a poor cunning peasant with a goat outsmarts a group of traders in the bazaar the villagers have a good laugh at the expense of city folk. There are hundreds of jests and anecdotes told in a flat style, with no embellishments. These jests and anecdotes give us a taste of Armenian humour, with everything in the tale leading to the climax or the 'punch-line' at the end. The wit of the *dzour* Armenian seems to be a part of his rebellious nature, and in life, as in folktales, the Armenian is sometimes saved by his wit.

The brief, informal notes at the end of the book are meant for the general reader, and details that might interest only a folklorist not likely to be familiar with Armenian village dialects, are omitted. In a literary work even the need for notes might be questioned by some readers, and footnotes have been avoided in the text. Footnotes break the continuity of the tale and destroy some of the story-illusion. Folktales are told by common folk to common folk without footnotes. But I hope that even the scholar and the specialist will find in this book some fresh hitherto unavailable material of interest to them.

A translation that does not reproduce the unique, one might say the

Introduction

mysterious charm of the original is worthless in a poetic work—and these tales, to repeat, are samples of Armenian village poetry. Accuracy, important as it is, must come later. And indeed the tale is falsified when its original flavour and beauty are lost in translation, no matter how 'accurate'. The problem of style, then, is of crucial importance in a work of this nature. This might have been a better book if not so scientifically accurate. But despite certain losses incurred for the sake of accuracy, if the folktales of Armenia find at last their rightful place among the folk-tale classics of Europe and the Near East, and these apples of immortality renew the youth of the reader, and charm especially the young, I would feel amply rewarded for my efforts.

Armenians love their folktales. The volumes published by the Academy of Sciences are quickly sold out in substantial editions of 15,000 copies or more, and they do not remain on library shelves, to be consulted occasionally by some specialist, but compete, as sheer entertainment, with the modern novel and short story, even though each volume has a glossary of words no longer in current use and the old peasant speech is often difficult to follow. These folktales would lose their flavour in standard literary Armenian. Today their language is uncommon enough to be poetic and to sound delightfully different, the Turkish and Persian words adding to the flavour.

There are untold riches in the treasure-trove of the Armenian folk-tale, and Armenia, a marginal country, with an ancient sophisticated civilization, may be expected to excel in this East-West art. These Armenian tales with their complex plots, are complete stories, not fragments. No fresh supplies as in the days of the great collectors are likely to be added to the folklore archives of the Academy of Sciences. The tales of the western sector have disappeared with the tellers; not many survived to tell *hekiatner*. Most of the tales, perhaps the best, have been lost forever. And the eastern sector has been industrialized. Today the old Armenian villages at the foot of Mt Ararat are brightly lit with electricity.

'There was and there was not'—and the story that follows is told as something that did and did not happen. In the same way, for most readers, Armenia itself, I fear, exists and does not exist.

To begin with, there are several Armenias: an ancient kingdom; Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Turkish, Russian Armenia; Versailles Treaty or Wilsonian Armenia, created on paper when America considered taking Armenia under her protective wing, and declined; the Armenian SSR; the Armenian Diaspora, with colonies all over the world; Armenia as a

Apples of Immortality

dream, a vision. There is no other country like her. She has played a unique and perhaps indispensable role as a buffer between Asia and Europe, a mediator between two seemingly irreconcilable civilizations and ways of life. And her dark beauty is eternal.

If you ask a group of average Americans or Britons precisely where Armenia is, I doubt that you'll get a correct answer. It's a tricky question. Geographically historic Armenia lies in part on the Soviet-Turkish and Soviet-Iranian frontier, a formidable natural fortress thrust into the sky between the Caucasus and the Taurus. To the Greek and the Roman, to the Arab and the Persian, it was a remote, inaccessible land, awesome and silent. Much of it remains so to this day.

You can visit Soviet Armenia comfortably enough by plane or train. Erevan, the capital, is at the base of 17,000-foot Mt Ararat, a few hours' flying time from Moscow. The Turkish portion of Armenia, eastern Anatolia to Turks, can be reached by plane or train from Ankara, or, if you happen to be in no hurry and want to see more, by ship along the old Argonautic route to Trebizond, where I was born.

As your ship sails up the Bosphorus, leaving Istanbul astern, the waters become perceptibly darker and the shadows lengthen in the wooded bays. You feel something distinctly northern, of the mountains, in the cooling air: prelude to Pontus and Armenia. This is the classic coast of the Black Sea, the most sea-like of all seas, which the Greeks called *Pontos Euxeinós*, the 'hospitable' sea, or simply, *Pontos*, the sea. Turkish boys row out in medieval high-prowed rowboats to sell you the fruits of the season. You eat delicious grapes, plums, pears, apples, figs, melons, cherries. The word cherry, by the way, comes from *Cerasus*, the ancient name of Giresun, near Trebizond. And Sinope was the birthplace of Diogenes.

At last you reach Trebizond (Trabzon in Turkish), the Queen of the Euxine and a jewel of a city when I was a boy. Here Xenophon's Ten Thousand cried, '*Thalassa! Thalassa!*' 'The sea! The sea!' as they came down from the Armenian mountains, groggy from the intoxicating honey they had eaten on the way. The city excited the Greeks, and it is still an exciting place, though shorn of its former importance as an emporium of world commerce.

What you see from the deck is a radiant white town with red-roofed houses clustered at the foot and climbing up the slopes of a huge solitary rock 900 feet high. The bright green of its walled gardens, filled with oranges, pomegranates, and figs, is interspersed with the dark green of cypresses, clumps of which indicate cemeteries. The top of the rock is

Introduction

table-flat, a trapezoid—whence, probably, the original name of the city, Trapezus. We boys liked to romp and somersault on it, intoxicated by the invigorating air and the smell of the springy turf with its little golden flowers we called 'Tears of the Holy Virgin'. This venerable rock snuggles the city to its breast like some Cyclopean divinity, and at night it looks like a cowed monk.

The convent near its summit fascinated me as a boy; it ascended like a white aerial stairway to the throne of God. The frescoes on the damp walls of this rock-hewn cloister glowed with a dark luminosity—saints, emperors and empresses in Byzantine vestments, lamenting forever the crucifixion of Christ. There was an everlasting sadness in their almond-shaped eyes, they looked tortured by the world's evils and very much alone in these sacred caves. What moved me even more was the bewilderment I read in their flat, pious faces—the dread of the rude archers from the East, the mounted hordes of Alp-Arslan and the terrible Turkish infantry that followed under Mohammed II. I grew up among 'Romans,' *Horomner*, as we called the Greeks in Trebizond, and spoke Greek at an early age. I often passed the ruins of the old Byzantine citadel, where the Grand Comneni called themselves 'Emperor and Autocrat of the Romans'. To some my family was more Greek than Armenian. But I was in fact an ardent little Armenian always playing soldiers as a warrior of Sassoun.

A few miles west of Trebizond's ancient walls, where the Greco-Roman world stopped the barbarian manswarm of Goths and waves of Turcomans, lies a village of olive groves, facing a bay so well sheltered from the winds that sweep down from the Russian steppes and the Caucasus, that ships take refuge there in stormy weather. To the east of the city you can see the sharp crest of Lazistan, the old Colchis, in the wooded magic of which the Argonauts sought the Golden Fleece. The magic is still there. You are on the Turkish edge of the Black Sea Riviera that runs all the way to the Crimea.

In Trebizond you can still see lateen-rigged Turkish coasters scudding along like great white-winged birds kicking back showers of spray, or floating at anchor like painted swans in deep-blue bays. The mountains with their pine forests rise tier upon tier from the very edge of the water. Some of the cargo boats in the harbour have high, incurving bows and sterns, like Roman or Egyptian galleys, and they are rowed by stalwart men of the Laz tribe, who stand up and drop to their seats together. The Lazes form the substratum of Trebizond's population. Georgian by race, Moslem by faith, they man Turkey's ships and make the best foot

Apples of Immortality

soldiers in her armies. Kemal Atatürk's bodyguard was composed of Lazes, and as pirates and cutthroats the Lazes have a history scarcely equalled anywhere.

Ashore in Trebizond, you find yourself in a town with narrow, break-neck streets and the battlemented grandeur of antiquity. There are rows of silent houses with their upper stories jutting out; public fountains with a wild tangle of old Arabic inscriptions from the Koran, or with a modest Christian cross still faintly visible on a marble façade. Swallows build their nests under eaves and balconies. Wisterias and climbing roses cascade over doors and garden walls. There are fan-shaped lights over the doors, and brass knockers in the form of lyres or doves.

When I was a boy in Trebizond '*Vardal*' 'Look out!' (from the Italian *guarda*) shouted the *hamals*, those human vans of the East, as they made their way through the traffic under heavy loads. Today hamels have to compete with motor cars. You are likely to see American GI's riding in jeeps, for the Soviet border is only a hundred miles away as the crow flies and this is a closely guarded military zone. The harbour and the roads have been improved with American aid, and there are other evidences of progress. But barefoot men still tin copper utensils here, and goldsmiths turn out bracelets, brooches, rings and earrings in filigree. There are also combmakers, basket weavers, potters, artisans making clogs or printing flower patterns on cloth. The old market place is a labyrinth of medieval lanes.

My father's pharmacy was in the centre of Trebizond, on the main business street. Its name, *Central Pharmacy*, was written in gold letters on its broad panes in French, Turkish, Armenian and Greek. It was exclusively a prescription pharmacy; my father would have been puzzled, not to say horrified, by the modern American drugstore. In the back room a Greek physician, Dr Andreas Metaxas, examined his patients, some of whom came on mules and donkeys from distant villages.

We lived in a little residential street that was walled at one end to bar traffic. Its flagstone pavement was so clean you could spread your bed on it and sleep, as we said. But it was not closed to peddlers. First to come by in the morning was the baker, with his donkey loaded with two panniers of bread fresh from the oven. A string of blue beads at the neck and the forehead protected the donkey from the evil eye. The baker kept his accounts with us by cutting notches on a tally-stick kept in our dining-room. He was followed by one or two *simitjis*, young Turks who sold crisp sesame rings in round wooden trays suspended from their

Introduction

necks. Then came the vegetable men in their hobnailed shoes, one carrying a basket on his back and the other holding a primitive weighing instrument with pebbles of various sizes for weights. My mother always bargained with them, bringing the prices down a penny or two, before she bought the day's supply. Village women in the costumes of Byzantine frescoes cried in shy voices 'Xino ghalal' as they sold milk and yoghurt in clay jugs and jars of classic form. The fishmongers shouted in hearty voices, 'Barbunya! Mezit! Khalkhan!' (I don't know their English names, but these are the best fish in the world) or 'Hamsi! Hamsi!' 'Anchovies! Anchovies!'—which were so abundant and cheap at the height of the run that peasants used them as fertilizer. At night we heard the cries of popcorn vendors, and at intervals our watchman struck the flagstones with his iron-tipped staff to report that all was well.

When my father came home in the evening we all gathered in the living room, which was furnished *à la Turca*, with a map of Italy and a blackboard on the wall. Father loved wall maps. After slipping off his black shoes with the elastic at the sides, he would sit cross-legged on a little mattress by the stove, near Nené. Victoria, our maid, a beautiful girl born in a village and taken into our home when she was nine, would bring him the silver tray with his *apéritif*, a daily family rite. Father would pour himself a spot of raki (mastic brandy) from a decanter in a silver holder, add a little water, which turned the drink milky white, and toss it off as we all said, 'Anoush ella' 'May it taste sweet!' Then he would wipe his mouth with a cloth napkin, exhale with a sound of noisy enjoyment, and help himself to a bit of caviar, or Roquefort cheese, or a pickle, or squeeze a few drops of lemon juice on a raw oyster and swallow it.

'I am a lord, a lord!' he would shout, meaning an English lord, the epitome of good living and worldly comforts. 'Here are my four children, here is my woman. What more can a man ask?' And my mother would blush, for he said 'woman' as if he meant 'wench'. Mother was thirteen years younger than my father, and taller. She was the 'Circassian princess' type, with ivory-white skin and long light-brown hair tied in a knot at the back of her head, while father was swarthy. According to family legend, she was so beautiful in her youth, before she married at nineteen, that a handsome Austrian prince, exiled to Trebizond for some mischief in Vienna or Istanbul, had fallen in love with her and wanted to marry her. She was the daughter of a rich merchant who played backgammon with the Turkish governor-general and headed the Armenian community in Trebizond before he was shot down in the

central square by order of Sultan Abdul Hamid—to suppress an Armenian ‘rebellion’.

Our dining-room was strictly European, except for a copper brazier on which we toasted bread. A map of Greece hung on the wall. We called supper tea. It lasted an hour, and we children had to mind our table manners. When we returned to the living room my father would resume his cross legged position by the stove and read *Byzantion*, a conservative Armenian daily published in Istanbul and opposed to our revolutionary hotheads. A frustrated teacher, my father believed that mathematics is mother of all knowledge. The two other requirements for a good education were classic Greek and music. He sent my sister Nevard to a Greek school—an insult to the Armenian community, which was proud of its schools—and my brother Onnik took private lessons in Greek. Nevard studied piano, Onnik violin. I was too young.

At night my father would entertain us by playing his violin and singing church hymns. Or he would stand up, stamping his foot and waving his arms, and lead us in singing his favourite songs. When we had guests, which was often, there would be a musical programme in our drawing room, which was furnished *à la Franca*, with some of the furniture imported from Paris. Onnik had to play his violin, accompanied by Nevard at the piano, and I would stand on a chair and recite a poem at the top of my voice. Later the women and children would retire to the living room and let the men play baccarat and chemin de fer. My father was a noisy player, always clowning, and always lost, which he thought the proper thing for a host to do. Midnight snacks were served. On special holidays my father engaged a European orchestra, the guests danced waltzes and quadrilles in our home, and several cases of champagne were consumed.

Easter was our greatest holiday. School closed for two weeks. Holy Week began with a vigorous house cleaning. Mother was busy preparing our Easter Sunday feast (a whole lamb stuffed with rice and roasted in our neighbourhood bakery), baking paschal cakes, dyeing eggs, sewing new clothes and buying new shoes for us children. On Maundy Thursday she took us to the public bathhouse, a one-time Byzantine church renamed the Bathhouse of Infidels—Giaour Hamami. We took along a few bundles containing Turkish towels, clogs inlaid with mother-of-pearl, silver bowls (heirlooms) for pouring water, and a basket of food with a bottle or two of lemonade, for this was an all-day ceremonial affair. The manager was a handsome, white-faced Turkish woman who

Introduction

smoked cigarettes and sat on a dais by the door. She and mother exchanged compliments as we entered. We undressed in the cool outer hall, which had a fountain and a fish pond in the centre, and bathed in the inner hall, a torrid steam-laden rotunda filled with an infernal din.

Rubens should have painted that bathhouse. The women of Trebizond are famous for their beauty, and during the Middle Ages they were the city's most valuable export. They were sought in marriage by Western and Eastern rulers alike—by the Duke of Burgundy and the emperors in Constantinople, no less than by the Turcoman chief of the White Sheep tribe, and by the kings of Georgia—all of whom sent ambassadors to Trebizond to find wives for them. Genoese and Venetian merchants, who had colonies in the city and controlled the commerce of the Black Sea, spread the fame of Trebizond women as the loveliest in the world, and their charms supplied the troubadours of France with an inexhaustible theme.

On Easter Day everyone wore his best. Even the poorest children had at least a pair of new shoes. Sophisticated women came out in the latest Paris styles, even though our bishop denounced them as sinful. And for two days afterward, people made and received calls, greeting each other with the Easter salutation—'Christ is risen from the dead'—and answering with the traditional response—'Blessed is the Resurrection of Christ'.

The next greatest holiday, excepting New Year, was Ascension Week, when we used to spend a few days at the Armenian monastery overlooking the site of Xenophon's camp. Built on a hill just off the highway to Erzurum, it had thick walls and a tower like a fort. Mother rented an apartment for us in the pilgrims' house, which had a gallery running along its entire length. From here we could look out over the walled-in quadrangle, where latecomers and poorer people stayed in tents. Soon the villagers came, and musicians with their bagpipes and drums—*davoul zourna*—and their *kemanchas*, native fiddles played upside down. The men wore the Laz garb: tight black jackets with long sleeves and two decorative cartridge pockets across the breast; black breeches very roomy at the seat and glove-tight at the legs; a black cloth hood knotted smartly around the head with its two ends flapping on the shoulders; cowhide moccasins or heelless shoes with toes ending in a leather thong turned backward.

The village women sported gorgeous costumes. Their skirts rustled as

they moved, and their red or blue velvet jackets, embroidered with gold or silver thread, fitted tightly around their sumptuous breasts. Gold coins were strung around their disclike red velvet caps (part of their dowry), and silver buckles shone on their red velvet shoes.

As our peasants danced, the village virgins stood coyly on display and the young men pick'd and wooed their future wives. Men and women danced in a circle, hand in hand, round and round, backward and forward, the basic circular dance of the Near East and the Balkans. The village men had martial dances of their own. They formed a closed circle, interlocking little fingers and raising their hands above their heads. With a warlike cry, 'Alashaghah!' they dropped or crouched together on one knee; then jumped up and came down again on the other knee, every muscle in their lithe strong bodies quivering with tension.

The sacrificial rams, lighted tapers fastened to their spiral horns, were led around the church three times in a religious procession, then butchered under the chestnut and walnut trees just outside the monastery gate and roasted. The meat was served in free communal meals for the salvation of the souls of our dead, while a couple of blind minstrels played their fiddles and sang of heroic deeds or metaphoric rhapsodies of love, either improvising or performing works by Sayat Nova, Ashough Jivani and other celebrated troubadours. Here is a song by Sayat Nova, who wrote and sang in his native Armenian as well as in Georgian and Azerbaijan Turkish and was the court poet of Georgia. He became a monk and was slain by Persian troops when he refused to renounce his Christian faith.

Your voice is sweet, your speech full of flavour;
May he whom you serve protect you, my love.
Your waist is the gazelle's and rose your colour,
Brocade from Frankistan you are, my love.

If I compare you to brocade, it will fray;
If to a plane tree, it will be felled one day;
All girls are likened to gazelles, you'll say;
How shall I describe your miracle, my love?

From Trebizond you can go to Erzurum by motor car, heading into the interior of historic Armenia by a highway that was once the golden road to Samarkand. Erzurum—'Roman fortress'—is headquarters of the Turkish Third Army, deployed along the rugged 350-mile Armenian-Georgian frontier from the Black Sea to Mt Ararat. A cold, grim city,

Introduction

with miles of army barracks. You are now on a treeless plateau, more than 6,000 feet above sea level, under the grand dominions of the eagle and the hawk. But wheat is grown even at this altitude, and flocks of sheep graze on mountain slopes, their little bells tinkling in the frosty air. The sheep dogs are big hairy beasts with spiked steel rings around their necks to protect them from the jaws of wolves. Each flock is led by a vanguard of male goats, bearded warriors of the range, whose bells are larger and make deeper, clanging tones. The sheep have fat tails and belong to the hardy karakul breed.

From Erzurum you can go to Kars by rail or motor car. You will pass more army barracks at Sarikamish, 7,500 feet above sea level, but the pine woods hereabouts will make you think you are in Switzerland, except that the winters are colder, with temperatures down to 30° below zero. Kars, which has changed hands many times, is another famous fortress city of great strategic importance—the key to the Caucasus. With its straight streets, built by Russians, it looks more European than Erzurum.

East of Kars, you travel by rail for thirty-five miles to the closely guarded Turkish-Soviet frontier. Then you are in Soviet Armenia and back in Europe. You change to a Russian train to go to Erevan. Erevan, once under Persian rule, has grown fast in the last three decades and is a modern European city today, with huge factories and a population of 750,000. You have descended to the comparatively low plain of Ararat, only 3,000 feet high, and the sun is warmer here. In the surrounding irrigated vineyards and orchards grow grapes that melt in your mouth, and the apricots—*Prunus armeniaca*—make you wonder if they dropped from heaven, such is their aroma.

Remember that Noah planted his own vineyard when he climbed out of the ark. Armenian vintners have Noah's original recipe for making wine, and I hope someday you taste Armenia's cognac and champagne. You are now close enough to Iran to feel the presence of the nightingale and the rose, and most of Erevan's new buildings are roseate in colour, being constructed of a light volcanic rock called tuff, which is quarried in all the colours of the rainbow, with pinks predominant.

Twin-peaked Ararat towers over Erevan, and surely no other city in Europe or elsewhere has such a majestic setting. There are no other mountains in Ararat's immediate vicinity, as though the Armenian Giant would tolerate none. That's what makes it appear so high. I have compared Kazbek with Ararat; they are about the same in height, but the

Apples of Immortality

Georgian Giant seems half as big. Great Ararat, with its cloudlike summit, looks like a mighty Biblical lord, with Little Ararat, a perfect cone, beside him as his gracious consort. They look like a royal couple reigning truly by the grace of God, with a kingdom of amber, amethysts and rubies spread at their feet. Though they seem very close to Erevan, these peaks lie twenty-two miles away in Turkish territory. Nevertheless, the picture of Ararat is on Armenia's state seal, for this mountain is the eternal symbol of our people, regardless of international treaties.

Said a Turk to an Armenian: 'By what right do you use the picture of Ararat on your state seal when you do not own it now?'

The Armenian shot back: 'You show a crescent on yours. Do you own the moon?'

North-east of Erevan flashes the vast blue flame of Lake Sevan. This lovely alpine sea is the highest lake in Europe; its water is fresh; its fish delectable. It supplies hydro-electric power for Armenia's industries. Sevan is ringed with icy peaks in winter. I'll never forget a blizzard near its shores. I groped blindly after an ox-cart, my breath turning to ice and locking my lips. I was mercilessly whipped by 'dragon-voiced' winds loosed from the crags of Mt Ararat. The storm ceased at last (I prayed, believe me), and I saw wolves and foxes skulking in the white night, their eyes blazing like live coals. This is a land rich in furred animals; we get 'ermine' from 'Armenian'.

The population of the Armenian republic is 2.3 million today; 1.5 million Armenians live in neighbouring Georgia and Azerbaijan, in the northern Caucasus and in other parts of Russia. Armenia is the smallest of the fifteen republics in the Soviet Union, and all that is left of historic Armenia as a political entity. Another 1.5 million of our people live in Iran, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, France, England, Bulgaria, Rumania, South America, Australia, Canada, and the United States, which has the largest colony. You are likely to find an Armenian no matter where you go.

A few miles from Erevan, in Armenia's oldest monastery at Echmiadzin, resides the Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of All Armenians. The Armenian Apostolic Church, founded by the Apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus according to our tradition, is independent of both the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches.

Greek historians, from Herodotus on, place our original habitat in Thrace, as early neighbours of the Macedonians. We speak, as I already said, an Indo-European language, related to Greek and English. Evidently,

Introduction

as the Armeno-Phrygians migrated to Asia Minor, they picked up the Hittite nose on their way. We are a nose-conscious nation, and nothing is so persistent as a nose.

Largely of Western origin, but living on the borders of the East, the Armenian combines the two within himself, and this duality in the unity of our people is the key to a complex, confusing phenomenon. East and West have fought it out in Armenia for at least two thousand years. And Europe and Asia have merged in Armenia. Hence our unique place in world culture.

In the development of architecture, for instance, Armenia played an important part—witness the clean-cut geometric beauty of the Armenian church, with its stone dome over a square. Armenians took certain architectural laws from the East, notably from Persia, perfected them and passed them on to Byzantium and the West.

Every other Armenian is a poet. ('And a rug dealer,' I can hear some saying, but there is poetry in oriental rugs.) Lyric poetry is an expression of a people's innermost feelings, and ours shows the fusion of East and West. It is at once European and Near Eastern, or perhaps I should say neither, but rather an art that is peculiarly and profoundly Armenian. I have in mind especially our medieval and early lyrics. They have the brilliance and colour of Persian poetry, but are more restrained. Passion is held in check. You don't find the Armenian poet indulging in the gaudy abandon of the Persian and the Arab; his is not the song of the seraglio. The nightingale sings in these poems and the gazelle exhibits her graces, which are those of the poet's beloved, but the girl does not live in a harem and is never a mere object of lust. She is extremely modest. Before marriage she is expected to be a chaste virgin, and as a wife absolutely faithful. Until recent years infidelity and divorce were unknown among us. We are a hot-blooded but moral race, with something puritanic in our national character. And our poetry is full of sorrow, the sadness of mortality and time, the grief of lost glory, of Armenia's subjection to this or that foreign foe.

Similarly, our music is Western-Eastern, a harmonious blending of opposing forces. You have probably heard the compositions of Aram Khachaturian. His *Sabre Dance* has made the American juke box. The fire and colour of the East are in his concertos, Gayane ballet, cantatas and toccata. There is no other music like it in Europe or Asia. It is Armenian—vigorous, dramatic, dreamy, melancholy. Khachaturian speaks to the Armenian soul, and at the same time interprets the modern temper. He derives much of his inspiration from our folk songs. They are

Apples of Immortality

sunny songs about bubbling waters and the snow peaks that shine like drawn swords in the blue Armenian sky, with words set to vibrant melodies that spurt from the heart. The trees and the flowers of the fields are in these songs, the cry of the exile pining for his native land, the sombre joy of the ploughman as he drives the oxen.

Our merchant also has brought East and West closer together. He has been the middleman between Europe and Asia. He led the caravans of the world from India and China to Persia, from Persia to Turkey and Russia, he bought and sold in Calcutta and Tabriz, in Aleppo and Trebizond, in Moscow and Venice, in Hamburg and Amsterdam. He spoke the languages of East and West with equal fluency, as no other merchant could, not even the Greek and the Jew, both of whom to this day have a healthy respect for Armenian shrewdness. And Armenian linguists served as diplomatic envoys of the Kings of Poland and the Czars of Russia. There was—there was not a merchant who went to Baghdad—or Istanbul, or Ispahan—on business and saved his neck from the executioner's axe by outwitting evil men, finding the right answer to a riddle or to a question put to him: this is a recurring theme in our folktales. We admire verbal ingenuity. At the last moment the harassed hero quips his way to freedom or turns the tables on his enemies.

I remember a story my father told. He was in Istanbul taking his final oral examinations for his degree. Pharmacy came under the medical school in those days, and he had to know a good deal of medicine.

'Name all the drugs you know that produce heavy perspiration in a patient,' asked a doctor with the title of pasha, who acted as the personal representative of Sultan Abdul Hamid. The room was full of government dignitaries in uniforms.

My father mentioned several drugs, but the pasha wasn't satisfied. 'You have missed an important one, Karapet effendi.'

My father named one or two more. The pasha shook his head and told my father he would fail if he could not remember this particular drug. Grave heads nodded. My father thought hard. 'Your Excellency,' he said at last, taking out his handkerchief and wiping the perspiration off his face, 'to make the patient sweat I would have him take this examination.'

The laughter was loud. The sultan's representative laughed, too, and my father was graduated—with a gold medal.

When I was editing an Armenian weekly I used to get articles trying to prove that the Anglo-Saxons originated in Armenia—that the Irish are a mere offshoot of our race—that Columbus and Napoleon were

Introduction

Armenians—that God speaks in Armenian. We sing in one of our popular songs:

Armenia, land of the Garden of Eden,
Thou the cradle of the human race !

To us Armenia is mother of the world, and on that basis you can trace everything and everybody to Armenia. I used to smile at Napoleon's supposed Armenian origin; actually, there is some evidence that his forebears came from Trebizond, but if so it was a Greek family that settled in Corsica, translating its name literally from Kalomeroi to Buonaparte. Napoleon's personal bodyguard was an Armenian from Karabagh, and when he abolished all the monastic orders in Italy he made one exception—the Armenian monastery in Venice, where Byron studied our language.

We dote on such information. We want people to know that Michael Arlen, who became the spokesman of Mayfair with *The Green Hat* and other books is our Dikran Kouyoumjian. We see William Saroyan's plays and read his books with the feeling that he is one of us.

My friend Dikran is a grocer, a prosperous one. When you enter his home you see a large portrait of Tigranes the Great (another spelling of Dikran) hanging in the hallway. When Tigranes, king of Armenia, saw the Roman legions under Lucullus he said contemptuously, 'If they come as ambassadors they are too many. If they come as soldiers, they are too few.' Dikran's heart glows every time he looks at this picture. Tigranes lived two thousand years ago, but it doesn't matter. Past and present are the same to this grocer in California.

But much as the Armenian loves his homeland, he has always felt a little out of place in his native environment, as though he does not quite fit there. The Turk, the Georgian, the Iranian, does not emigrate as a rule—the Armenian has always headed West when driven out of his homeland.

After the Seljuk Turks overran most of Asia Minor the Kingdom of Armenia held out for another 300 years in the mountains and plains of Cilicia along the Mediterranean, Tarsus, the birthplace of St Paul, becoming an Armenian capital. The Armenian barons in Cilicia were the allies of French, English, German, Spanish, Italian barons and fought with them for the delivery of the Holy Places. Latin became an official language of the Armenian court, and the last king of Armenia, Leon V de Lusignan, died in Paris in 1393, in the Palais des Tournelles, and was buried in the Celestine monastery. He made Richard II of England his testamentary executor. The Armenian king visited London in 1385, and

was met at Dover by the Duke of York, the Duke of Lancaster, and the flower of English chivalry, who escorted him to London, where he was personally greeted by Richard II. Leon V made an impassioned plea in Westminster palace for lasting peace with France, saying England and France were the two great powers of Europe Armenians admired most, and that their quarrels contributed to Armenia's downfall.

'This yere king Richard holding his Christmasse at Eltham, thither came to him Leo king of Armenia, whose countrie and realme being in danger to be conquered by the Turks, he was came into these west parts of chirstendome for aid and succor at the hands of the christian princes here. The king honorablie receiued him, and after he had taken counsell touching his request, he gaue him great summes of monie and other rich gifts, with a stipende (as some write) of a thousand pounds yearly to be paid to him during his life. After he had remained here two-moneths space, he took leaue of the king and departed. The chiefest point of his errand was, to haue procured a peace betwixt the two kings of England and France, but destinie would not permit so good a purpose to take effect: for the hatred which either nation bare to the other would not suffer their loftie minds to yeeld in any one point further than seemed good in their owne opinions.'

(*Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, vol. II, London, 1807, page 768.)

Young Charles VI of France personally welcomed the Lusignan King of Armenia to Paris and led him to the Louvre palace, and put another palace at his disposal. Leon V became his close friend and counsellor. Juan I of Castile raised his sword and led the great nobles and prelates of Spain, followed by a large throng, to the outskirts of Madrid to meet the King of Armenia, and touched by his story, gave him Madrid, Villárreal and Andújar for life, which meant a substantial income for Leon V as the seigneur or feudal lord of these cities. Juan I, with Pedro IV, of Aragon, paid the ransom demanded by the Sultan of Egypt and thus secured the release of the last Armenian king after seven years of captivity in Cairo.

All these kings of Europe wanted to help Leon V regain his throne, but Armenia's situation was hopeless; Byzantium itself was on its last legs. The King of Armenia was unable to reconcile England and France, the two most powerful states in Europe, and failed in his efforts to create a united front against the Turks. In his *Ecclesia Romana* Pope Gregory XIII probably expressed the popular sentiments that prevailed then about Armenia as Europe's trusted ally in the East.

'Among the other merits of the Armenian nation toward the Church

Introduction

and the Christian Republic,' wrote the Pope, 'there is an eminent one worthy of particular mention: while the Christian princes and armies went to fight for the delivery of the Holy Land no nation and no people came to their aid more promptly and zealously than the Armenians, with men, horses, supplies, counsel; with all their forces and with the greatest courage and fidelity, they aided the Christians in these holy wars.'

Armenia fell, and for centuries was cut off from the rest of Christendom. A more realistic policy might have saved her, she could have reached, perhaps, an understanding with her mighty Mohammedan neighbours, but Armenia was enamoured with the West and turning against the West would have been treason. Armenia's basic policy had not changed for a thousand years. We have been historically conditioned to this orientation. And so we have remained a small nation, squeezed in between colossal neighbours and often trampled under their feet. We have been in close contact with the great civilizations of the world from the very beginning of our history, and in the path of marching empires. We did some marching ourselves. We were the first nation in the world to accept Christianity—and have battled for it constantly, either with our own armies or through the Armenian emperors and generals of Byzantium, and there were many of them. We have been put to the sword, wiped out time and again, yet by some miracle have survived to defy our foes.

Armenians in the Diaspora are still haunted by their old fear of national extinction, for we have been wiped out from four-fifths of our homeland. No more Armenians live in Trebizond, in Erzurum, in Van, in Moush, in Bitlis, in Sassoun, in Cilicia, in the villages around Musa Dag, in Kars. In the past, large Armenian colonies have melted away in the Crimea, in Poland, in the Ukraine, in Hungary, in Rumania, in India. So we wonder how long we can last this time. We know we cannot survive in our foreign colonies, where we are confronted by the spectre of complete assimilation in other cultures—the 'white massacre.' The Armenian republic is our only hope for national survival.

'After we die no more Armenians will be left in the colonies.' You still hear this complaint in Armenian gatherings, although in the past few years, with cultural relations increasing between the Armenian republic and the colonies, the fear of eventual extinction is subsiding, and Armenians everywhere are heartened by a repatriation movement made possible by the progress in the homeland, which has received 120,000 repatriates since 1946. This movement back to the homeland will continue and reverses a historic process.

Apples of Immortality

We get together to hear our music and poetry and to enjoy tribal dinners. Choice bits of lamb marinated overnight in wine and spices and barbecued on skewers, and served with pilav, made either with rice or bulgur, parched crushed wheat. And before we get to them we eat a rich flaky pastry filled with ground meat or with cheese, and sample a variety of cold and hot dishes elaborately prepared with eggplant, tomatoes, green peppers, green beans, sugar peas, artichokes, vine leaves. Our etiquette requires that there should be at least twice as much food on the table as can be eaten.

'Don't refuse, I beg you. Try another bite of this.'

'What kind of Armenian Christian are you? You haven't eaten anything.'

And more food is piled on your plate. And your glass is filled again for another toast, or poem, or speech. The speeches are endless.

We get up and dance hand in hand, round and round, the leader waving a twisted handkerchief, while native musical instruments play the old familiar songs. And constantly we argue over how to save the colonies, how to stay Armenian in New York and California, in London and Paris, in Athens and Beirut, in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, in Canada, in Australia . . . until some day most of us can live perhaps on Armenian soil. That is the dream of our patriots. Back to Ararat!

Uprooted, divided, scattered, Armenians cling to their identity with all their might, unwilling to give up their dream, while the dissolving torrents of time flow past the last remaining ramparts, and in the colonies the walls crumble under our feet.

The Armenian is mad, of course. A fool in the cruel court of time, singing his undying song. Babylonia, Assyria, the Hittite Empire, Parthia, Medea, Rome, Byzantium—all have vanished from the stage of history, but Armenia, their contemporary, lives to this day.

Our poets still write, architects build, musicians compose, merchants contribute to national causes. There is no letup. Classes are held in dilapidated old buildings in the slums of Beirut and Aleppo, in Arab villages along the Euphrates (which flows down, as does the Tigris, from our mountains). Ragged, barefoot, bright-eyed children, whose parents have been DPs for fifty years, learn the Armenian alphabet, sing our folk songs, recite the cherished words of our national poets, listen to the old folktales, and pore over new readers printed in Erevan especially for them. You may see the ravages of hunger on their faces—but Tigranes the Great still enters Antioch at the head of 500,000 troops and routs the Parthian cavalry, the battle under St Vardan the Brave is fought again

Introduction

for Church and Nation, and Armenia continues to guard the eastern marches of Christendom, vanguard of Western civilization in the East.

And while East and West clash in the immemorial fight, they remain one in the soul of the Armenian. For an example of what a peaceful and united world could be like I give you my Armenia through these folk-tales.

APPLES OF IMMORTALITY

There was and there was not a king who had three sons. An Apple-Tree of Immortality grew in his garden, and what a garden that was! Trees and flowers from every part of the world; birds of every hue glorifying men's hearts with their songs. But the most beautiful and valued tree in the king's garden was an Apple-Tree of Immortality. When the Apple-Tree bloomed the fragrance of its pink-and-white blossoms filled the whole kingdom. People who smelled these blossoms didn't care to eat or drink; all they wanted was to breathe in their heavenly odour. The Apple-Tree of Immortality was the wonder of the whole world.

The king's gardeners took very good care of this Tree, but the king never ate its apples to stay young, for every year, when they were ripe enough to be picked, somebody sneaked into the garden and stole them.

One day the king summoned his three sons and said :

'O my sons, my young lions, this can't go on, we must catch the thief.'

The eldest son said : 'O Father, we are just as puzzled as you are. It dishonours our family name not to be able to catch the thief. Let me guard the Apple-Tree this year, and when I lay my hands on the man who has been stealing our apples I'll tear him to pieces !'

'I hope you catch him, son.'

The prince slung on his arms and went out to the garden to watch that Tree day and night. On the last night, when the apples were ripe and he intended to pick them the next morning, his eyes grew heavy with sleep. He struggled hard to stay awake. The sky glittered with stars and the trees, swaying in the breeze, whispered in his ears : 'Sleep, O prince, sleep.' By midnight he was fast asleep, and when he woke in the morning he saw that not a single apple was left on the Tree, it was stripped bare again. He went home shame-faced, and told his father what happened.

'I wasn't asleep more than an hour !' he cried.

Apples of Immortality

The next year the middle son said to the king: 'O Father, it is now my turn to guard the Apple-Tree.'

'Very well, you be our watchman this year.'

The middle son slung on his arms and went out to the garden to keep his vigil under the Apple-Tree, and he too fell asleep as he lay in the grass looking at the stars and listening to the nightingale. In the morning all the apples were gone. He was afraid to face his father but he had to tell the king what happened.

'You and your eldest brother are alike, you talk big, and do nothing,' said the king, and dismissed him from his presence.

Then the king's youngest son said: 'O Father, it's now my turn to guard the Apple-Tree.'

'O my son, how can you expect to catch the thief when your older brothers tried and failed?'

The youth insisted, and the king gave his consent. The youngest son slung on his arms and went out to the garden, where he watched the Apple-Tree for a week, two weeks, three weeks, until the apples were fully ripe. 'I'll pick them early in the morning,' he said to himself, as he lay in the grass, keeping a wary eye on the Tree, but for him too it was hard to stay awake on a clear August night, with the sky aglow with the Milky Way, the moon rising from behind a mountain with all the grace of a new bride, and cool mountain breezes laden with the fragrance of apples and roses blowing on his face. He dozed off for a while, but woke with a start, and by cutting his finger with his pocket knife and sprinkling salt on the wound he stayed awake for the rest of the night.

All of a sudden, as day broke, there was a crash in the garden and the king's youngest son saw a giant monster with seven heads come growling and pounding through the trees and wind himself around the Apple-Tree. The youth drew his sword and struck at the monster so hard that he slashed off four of the giant's heads, and the huge monster fell with a crash, but he scrambled to his feet and ran before the king's youngest son could kill him. The monster ran and ran with the young prince hard at his heels. The youth lost sight of him in the murky light, but by following the track of blood the monster left behind him he was on the giant's trail again, until the monster jumped into a well and disappeared with another crash. The youth peered down the well, but it was so deep he could not see the bottom. He marked the place with the tip of an arrow and returned to the orchard. He picked all the apples and took them to his father.

Apples of Immortality

The king thanked him, kissed him on the brow and said: 'Your brothers are worthless. You are my true successor.'

'O Father, we have to kill that dev or he will be back next summer,' said the youngest son.

The three brothers slung on their arms, took a long rope with them, and went to the well to kill the giant monster.

'Let me go down first,' said the eldest.

They tied the rope around his waist and lowered him into the well, but they had to pull him up when he screamed: 'I can't stand the heat! I'm burning, broiling!'

They lowered the middle brother into the well, and he too screamed: 'Pull me up, fast, I'm roasting!'

Even after his brothers' screams the king's youngest son wasn't afraid to go down into the well and said: 'Give no heed to my cries. Don't pull me up no matter how much I scream about the burning heat. Keep lowering the rope until I reach the bottom of the well.'

He went down, down, and called out from the bottom of the well: 'Brothers, you can now pull up the rope, I reached the bottom, and I am going after that dev to finish him off.'

He peered around and saw a door in the wall of the well. He opened this door and found himself in the chamber of an underground castle, where he saw a beautiful houri-like maiden seated in a golden seat, doing her needlework. On the gold tray before her a gold hound chased after a gold fox. And the Seven-Headed monster slept with his remaining three heads laid in the maiden's lap.

The maiden gasped when she saw the king's youngest son. 'Oh, how did you get in? No snake on its belly dares crawl into this place, no bird on the wing dares fly over it. And pray, what brings you here?'

'The love I bear for you,' said the king's youngest son.

'May you always be in love! But aren't you afraid of the Seven-Headed dev? He will gobble you down when he wakes up.'

'I'm not afraid of devs. I came here to finish him off. Wake him up. We'll fight.'

The maiden was in despair, and in the end woke up the giant monster.

The king's youngest son, with a single blow of his sword, slashed off the remaining heads of the monster.

'If you are so strong and fearless I dare you to kill his brother also,' said the maiden, glad to see the monster dead. 'You will find him in the next chamber with my middle sister.'

And the king's youngest son strode into the other chamber and saw

Apples of Immortality

an even more beautiful maiden seated in a gold seat, busy with needle and thread. A gold hen and a gold cock fluttered around on the gold tray before her. And the Twelve-Headed monster was fast asleep with his heads laid in the maiden's lap.

She too gasped when she saw the daring youth. 'Oh, how did you get in? No snake on its belly dares crawl into this place, no bird on the wing dares fly over it. And pray, what brings you here?'

'The love I bear for you,' he said.

'May you always be in love! But aren't you afraid of the Twelve-Headed dev? He will chop you up into mincemeat when he wakes up. I pity you, boy. Get out of here before it's too late.'

The king's youngest son said: 'I'm not afraid of devs. I came here to kill him. Wake him up. We'll fight.'

And in her despair the maiden woke up the giant monster. The king's youngest son slashed off all of its twelve heads and the monster lay dead at his feet.

The maiden cried in her joy: 'Ah, if you are so strong and fearless I dare you to kill also his brother. You will find him in the next chamber with my youngest sister.'

The king's youngest son opened the door of the other chamber and walked in. A maiden so incredibly lovely that he could gaze at her for seven days and seven nights without eating and drinking and just feasting his eyes upon her wondrous beauty sat in her gold seat and did her needlework, with a couple of gold partridges fluttering around on the gold tray before her. This maiden seemed to say to the sun: 'Stand back, and let me come out and shine in your stead.' It was a sight to drive a man out of his mind. The Forty-Headed monster slept with his heads laid in the maiden's lap.

She could not believe her eyes when she saw the fearless youth. 'You, an earthly mortal, here, in my chamber? What will you do when the Forty-Headed dev wakes up? Oh, I pity you, you are so young. Get out of here quick, and save your life before the dev eats you up.'

'I'm not afraid of devs. I came here to kill him. Wake him up. We'll fight.'

And the maiden was in despair, but she saw that he really meant to kill the Forty-Headed monster.

'Be sure you cut off his heads at a single blow,' she warned him. When the dev says, "Strike me again," don't! The dev will revive if you strike him again.'

The earth shook as the Forty-Headed monster and the king's youngest

Apples of Immortality

son fought it out in this underground castle, and the noise they made rumbled through the Lower world like cracks of thunder. All forty heads of the giant flew off under a single blow of the youth's sword.

The monster cried: 'Boy, strike me again!'

'One blow is enough. I wasn't born of my mother twice to strike you twice.'

The giant sprawled dead at his feet. The maiden ran up to the fearless prince and threw her arms around his neck, crying in her joy:

'You are mine and I am thine!'

The king's youngest son wiped off his sword and put it back in its scabbard. He sat down and chatted with the maiden, who looked upon him as her saviour.

'We are three sisters,' she said. 'Daughters of a king. These devils abducted us and made us their wives. For years now we have been suffering at the hands of these monsters. You came just in time to save us.'

'It all turned out for the best,' said the king's youngest son. 'We are three brothers, and all three of us are single. My eldest brother can marry your eldest sister, my middle brother can marry your middle sister, and as for you, you are mine.'

They went to the other chambers and the three sisters helped the youth carry the treasure-hoard of the giant monsters to the centre of the well.

'Brothers, lower the rope,' the king's youngest son shouted from the bottom of the well. 'I found three devils and I killed all three. Haul up their treasure. Besides, I've got three beautiful brides for us.'

His brothers were very glad to lower the rope and haul up the treasure. Then he tied the rope around the waist of the oldest sister. 'Here is the bride for our big brother!'

They pulled her up.

'This one is for our middle brother!'

They pulled her up also.

It was now the turn for the youngest sister, and she said: 'You go up first. I will wait.'

'No, you go up first,' he insisted.

'I do not trust your brothers. If they leave you alone in this well go to the spring near here, and wait for three rams, one Black, one White, one Red, that come every Friday to drink from the spring. Jump on the back of the Black ram. The Black ram will throw you over to the Red ram, the Red ram will throw you over to the White ram, and the White ram will take you to the Upper world. Now be sure you jump first on the back of the Black ram, and not the White ram, because the White ram will throw

Apples of Immortality

you over to the Red ram, the Red ram will throw you over to the Black ram and the Black ram will take you down to the dark Lower world.'

The maiden took out her charm, a flint-stone, and gave it to him. 'It's my talisman. Take it. You might need it. When you strike this flint-stone you'll find our three gold trays before you.'

His brothers lowered the rope, he tied it around the waist of the youngest sister, and called to them: 'Here is my bride!'

They pulled her up and saw that she was the prettiest of all. 'What will Father think when he learns his youngest son killed the devs and also won the fairest bride?' they muttered in their envy. 'We'll be disgraced.'

They lowered the rope, and the king's youngest son tied it around his own waist.

'Brothers, you can pull me up now, I am ready to come up.'

They pulled him up only half way. Suddenly they cut the rope and the king's youngest son fell to the bottom of the well. His brothers took all that treasure, and the three beautiful sisters he had rescued from the giant monsters, and went back to the royal palace.

'O my sons, where is your youngest brother?' the king asked them.

'The devs ate him up before we could save him,' they said. 'We killed the devs, and took everything they had, but we lost our brother.'

Let us now leave them here and turn to the king's youngest son, abandoned by his brothers in the well. He saw there was no way out of it. But he found the spring, and waited for the three rams, hoping one of them would take him up to the daylight world above. The rams did come on Friday, one Black, one White, one Red, each more striking and perfect than the others, and drank from the spring, as the youngest sister told him they would. When they turned to go, he jumped, in his haste, on the back of the White ram, which threw him over to the Red ram, and the Red ram threw him over to the Black ram, and the Black ram carried him down to the dark Lower world.

The king's youngest son wandered around in the Lower world feeling very sad. An old woman gave him shelter, after he gave her a fistful of gold coins.

'Mamik, can you give me some water?' he said. 'I haven't had a drop of water for three days.'

The old woman gave him a bowl of muddy water.

'How can you drink this muddy water?'

'Son, that's the only kind of water we ever get down here, and some-

Apples of Immortality

times we have no water at all. Why should I hide it from you, when I can't hide it from God. Water is very scarce in this town. The Seven-Headed Dragon guards our spring and we have to feed it a young maiden every week before it will let us have any water. And today it's the turn



of the king's daughter to be fed to the Dragon, and it has eaten thousands of maidens like her.'

'Can't you kill the Dragon?'

'Son, nobody can kill this dreadful Dragon. Even our king is helpless against it.'

The king's youngest son stepped out of the old woman's house and quickly went to the spring, where the king's courtiers, friends, and servants had already gathered, and the servants carried trayfuls of tasty foods for the crowd. People waited with pitchers in their hands as the king's daughter, dressed in black, was led ceremoniously to the Dragon. The youth followed the princess. The Dragon opened its jaws and waited for them both, glad to know it would have two people for its meal, but the king's youngest son drew his sword and struck so fast that he cut the Dragon in two.

'Boy, strike me again!' the Dragon howled, writhing in a pool of blood.

'No, I was born of my mother only once, and I strike only once.'

The Dragon dropped dead before him, and the king's youngest son rescued the princess. He did not see her dip her hand in the blood and stamp it on his back.

Apples of Immortality

The water flowed, and people filled their pitchers and went home, glad to know they were rid of the Dragon for good, their daughters at last were safe, and there would now be plenty of water for everybody. The happy princess also went home, and told her parents how a youth she never saw before slew the Dragon and saved her life. She had no idea who he was.

'Will you recognize the fellow if you see him again?' the joyous king asked her.

'Of course I will,' said the princess.

The king's heralds proclaimed throughout the city that all men should gather before the royal palace. And not a single man was missing in the throng that stood before the king.

'Take a good look at all these men and see if you can recognize the fellow who saved your life,' the king said to his daughter.

Her gaze swept over the crowd of men, and suddenly she saw him. 'There he is, that's the boy!'

The king's men brought the youth before him.

'O Father,' said the princess, 'I stamped his back with the Dragon's blood, using my hand.'

They saw it on the youth's back, and the king said: 'Name your reward, my brave lad, and it shall be yours.'

'May the king live long, I want no reward.'

The king said: 'No, no, I must reward you for your courage. Would you like to have my daughter as wife, or is it perhaps half of my kingdom that you desire? Just tell me what you want and it shall be yours.'

'May the king live long, my sole desire is to get back to the Upper world. I want no other reward from you.'

'That, son, would be very difficult. I couldn't take you to the Upper world myself. And there is not a single wiseman in my kingdom who knows the way to the Upper world. Only the Emerald Bird can take you there. This Bird has been complaining to me about a Dragon that has been eating her young year after year. Now, if you can kill that Dragon also, the Emerald Bird I am sure will do anything for you.'

And the king told him where he might find that bird. The youth crossed seven mountains and seven valleys searching for the Emerald Bird. He stretched out under a tall tree to rest. Its branches reached up to the sky, and it was so thick with leaves that not a gleam of light penetrated it. All of a sudden he saw a great big Dragon, the size of a mountain, crawl up the tree baring its fangs. And the king's youngest

Apples of Immortality

son also hacked this Dragon to pieces with his sword. He was so worn out by now that he fell asleep under the tree.

The Emerald Bird came flying over the woods to feed its young and thought the man lying under the tree, covered all over with blood, had again eaten its young. The bird swooped down to peck him to bits, but her young screeched from above, fluttering their little wings on top of the tree: 'He saved us from the Dragon, Mother!'

The bird spread out its immense wings to fan and shield the sleeping youth. And when the king's youngest son awoke the Emerald Bird said: 'O my friend, you saved my nestlings from the Dragon. I'll give you anything you want.'

'All I want is to get back to the Upper world.'

'Too bad you met me in my old age. That would have been child's play in my youth. But old as I am I shall do my best to take you to the Upper world. Ask the king to give you forty large skins of water and forty fat sheep-tails. You will have to feed me and water me during our flight to the Upper world.'

The youth received these supplies from the king of the Lower world and loaded them on the giant vulture.

'Now sit on my back. We are ready to go. When I say, "Boo!" give me a skinful of water, and when I say "Ghee!" toss a sheep-tail into my mouth.'

The mighty bird flew away and soared to the Upper world, the king's youngest son feeding her the sheep-tails and giving her skinfuls of water to drink until at last he saw sunlight. He got off in his father's kingdom and walked toward his own city. The Emerald Bird flew back to the Lower world.

On his way to the city the king's youngest son met a shepherd.

'Good day, brother shepherd.'

'God's day, king's kin.'

'Would you mind trading your clothes with mine, brother shepherd? I'll pay for them.'

The shepherd was glad to take off his rags and wear the royal garments of the king's son, and to be paid for his rags in the bargain. Disguised as a poor shepherd the king's youngest son entered the city and roamed in the bazaar. He paused before the shop of the king's goldsmith, who asked him what he wanted.

'Master, I am a stranger here, looking for work. I wouldn't have to go hungry if I could learn a good trade, like yours.'

'Would you like to work as my apprentice?'

Apples of Immortality

'Or course I would, dear master. And I would kiss your hand for it.'
So the king's goldsmith took him on as an apprentice.

Let us now see what happened to his older brothers. The king suspected some treachery and sent messengers to many lands with orders to find his youngest son, and meanwhile he did not allow his older sons to marry until his youngest was found.

The king's men searched for the young prince everywhere. A year passed; two years, three years passed, and still no sign of the boy. The king's chamberlain said: 'When are you going to let your two sons marry? They have been waiting for three years now. What will your subjects think?'

'Very well, then, let them marry,' the king sighed.

His eldest son married the eldest sister, and his middle son married the middle sister. After the double wedding the king drew the youngest sister aside and said:

'O my daughter, we have not found your betrothed, and we do not know what happened to him, he must have suffered some misfortune. My youngest son may never come back. You have to think about yourself too. You cannot remain single forever. Isn't there, perhaps, some other man you would like to wed?'

'May the king live long, any man you choose would be agreeable to me.'

'Would you care to wed the son of my chamberlain?'

'Yes, if you wish it.'

'Then it's settled. I shall give you to the son of my chamberlain, and announce your betrothal.'

'May the king live long, I have three requests to make of you before I marry the chamberlain's son.'

'My child, I would gladly grant any request you make.'

'May the king live long, I want from you three gold trays. One with a couple of gold partridges fluttering on it. Another with a gold cock and a gold hen on it. And on the third tray a gold hound chasing after a gold fox.'

'I shall call my goldsmith at once and order these trays for you.'

The king sent for his goldsmith and gave him the order.

'I will chop off your head if you do not deliver these trays in a month,' he added.

The goldsmith went back to his shop with a heavy heart, and his

Apples of Immortality

apprentice asked him: 'What happened, master? Why do you look so sad and worried?'

The goldsmith did not tell him why. He worked on the king's order, destroying what he made, then starting again, until only two days were left and he had nothing to show the king for his efforts.

'My dear master, what are you trying to make, what's troubling you? Do tell me!'

'Oh, don't bother me with your silly questions. It's my worry, not yours.'

'Maybe I can help you.'

And the goldsmith at last told him about the king's order.

'Is that all? That's nothing to worry about. I will have these trays ready for you tomorrow morning. Just give me a bag of walnuts and a bag of hazelnuts and let me sleep tonight in the shop. You can come in the morning and see if I've kept my promise.'

'That boy is a fool to think he can do it, but I'll let him try anyway,' the goldsmith said to himself, and gave his apprentice the two bags of nuts he asked for. The goldsmith let him stay in the shop all night to work on the king's order. He closed the door of the shop behind him and went home.

His apprentice spent the night cracking and eating nuts. And just before daybreak he took out the flint-stone the youngest sister gave him as her talisman and struck it against the wall. Instantly, the three gold trays with all the gold things on them were in the shop before him. The goldsmith was waiting outside, not daring to go in until his apprentice called him.

'Master, you can come in now, everything is ready.'

The goldsmith entered his shop and could not believe his eyes when he saw the three gold trays. He kissed his apprentice on the brow and said: 'You saved my neck! I'll get a big reward for this.'

It was the last day of the month. The goldsmith took the gold trays and rushed to the palace. The king was delighted with them, and the goldsmith returned to his shop with a big reward from the royal treasury.

The king called the youngest sister to his side and asked her: 'My child, are these the gold trays you wanted?'

'Yes, my king.'

She bit her finger, thinking: 'He is back, my betrothed is alive! I gave him my talisman, and I know that no one but he could make these

Apples of Immortality

trays.' She took a deep sigh of relief, and told the king his youngest son was alive and working most likely in the royal goldsmith's shop.

The king sent for the apprentice. The lad came to the palace and kissed his father's hand, and told him everything.

'Executioners!'

The executioners came in and bowed.

'Seize these two treacherous brothers and cut off their heads!'

But the king's youngest son fell on his knees and implored the king to spare their lives. 'O Father, I wish my brothers no harm, may God be their judge.'

'I will spare their lives for your sake.'

The king stepped down from the throne and had his youngest son sit on it. He called off the betrothal of the youngest sister to his chamberlain's son two days before the wedding was to take place, and that lovely sunbright maiden married his own son and became the queen of the new king, amid great rejoicings. The wedding feast, to which all his subjects were invited, lasted for seven days and seven nights.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

THE SWINEHERD

There was and there was not a king. This king was a mighty ruler, and very fond of hunting. One day while hunting in the woods he saw a strange beast that sparkled like sunlight, and he said to his chamberlain:

'Let's capture it alive. It would be a pity to kill this beautiful Beast.'

They set a trap, caught it, took it to the king's castle.

'Build a glass cage for it so that people can come and see it,' the king commanded. And everybody who saw this Beast was amazed. It was the wonder of the whole kingdom.

The king had an only son who had just turned thirteen. One day the lad broke the glass wall of the cage with an arrow shot from his bow. He asked for his arrow, but the Beast would not give it back.

'Not until you let me out of here,' the Beast said. 'Bring the key your father keeps under his pillow and open this cage. I'll never forget your kindness if you set me free.'

The boy felt sorry for the Beast glowing like sunlight, fetched the key, and opened the door of the glass cage.

'Come to me if you ever get in trouble with your father,' the Beast said. 'You will find me near the big spring in the wood.' And it ran away.

The king became furious when he learned the rare beast he prized so much had escaped from the glass cage, and that it was his own son who opened the door of the cage. He ordered his executioners to chop off the boy's head.

His chamberlain cried out in horror: 'He is the only son you have. How can you kill him for such a trifle? Banish him from your kingdom. That will be punishment enough.'

The king called the chamberlain's son, gave him plenty of money for travelling expenses and said to him: 'Take that boy away from here and I don't care what you do with him. He is no longer my son and I don't want him to set foot on the soil of my kingdom again.'

Apples of Immortality

The two boys started out on their journey, and while travelling through the wood, on their way to another kingdom, the chamberlain's son said to the king's son: 'Give me your armband, or I will kill you!'

'You can have it, I don't need it,' said the king's son, and let him have his royal arm-band. The chamberlain's son tied it around his arm and said: 'From now on I am the king's son and you are my servant. Be sure you say nothing about this to anyone.'

The chamberlain's son lay down under a tree and went to sleep. The king's son wandered off by himself and while rambling in the wood saw the Beast he had set free; it glowed and glittered near a spring. The boy wept for joy and told the Beast his troubles.

'Never mind,' said the Beast. 'Just drink the water of this spring and you'll be all right.'

The boy drank the water, and the Beast said: 'Now shake this tree.' He shook the tree, and pulled it up from the ground.

'Drink some more!'

The boy drank more water.

'Now shake that tree over there.'

He shook it, and tore it up by its roots.

'Are you satisfied, or do you want to be stronger?'

'I'd like to be a little stronger,' said the boy.

'Then you have to drink more water.'

The boy drank some more, and pulled up a tree twice the size of the other two.

'Are you satisfied now?'

'Oh, quite. Thank you.'

The boy went back to the chamberlain's son, who was now awake, and they continued their journey. It's hard to say how far they travelled until they reached the city of another king. The chamberlain's son sent a messenger ahead to inform the king of his arrival with his servant, and the king received him in his castle with royal honours. He liked both boys and said to the chamberlain's son:

'I will give you my second daughter in marriage, and from this day on you are my son-in-law. As for your servant, I'll be glad to have him work for me. What kind of work would you suggest for him?'

'Oh, it doesn't matter. Anything you have in mind would be all right.'

'Would you like to be my Swineherd?' the king asked the boy.

'I wouldn't mind,' he said.

And so he became the king's Swineherd. His task was to drive the pigs out to pasture in the morning and bring them back at sundown. He

The Swineherd

slept in a smelly little hovel near the pigsties. He was up early the next morning, picked up a log he saw lying on the ground, and went up to the king's balcony, tap-tapping the hand-rails with his log which he used as a walking stick. The noise he made woke up everybody.

'What do you want?' the king's servants asked him.

'Give me a copper coin so that I can buy some nuts,' he said.

The king said: 'Here, boy, take this silver coin and buy all the nuts you want.'

'I don't want a silver coin. Where am I going to change it for small cash? All I want is a copper.'

He took the copper coin, went to the bazaar, and banged on the door of one shop after another, looking for nuts. And taking exactly a copper's worth of nuts he drove his herd to the king's meadows. When he brought the pigs back in the evening he strode up to the king and said:

'Order an iron stick for me, O king!'

'Isn't that log big enough?'

'Oh, this is nothing, just a thin shoot. I need a stick weighing at least a thousand pounds.'

The king promised to order one for him.

The next morning the Swineherd woke up everybody again with his loud rapping as he marched down the balcony with his log, banging it on the hand-rails. He asked for another copper to buy nuts. They gave him the coin, and he smashed ten shops, took a copper's worth of nuts, and drove his herd to pasture.

His iron stick was ready for him the next morning. The boy weighed it in his hand. 'Just what I wanted,' he said, put it on his shoulder, and drove his pigs to open fields, all the way into the land of the Black Dev.

The gate of the Dev's mansion was locked. He smashed it to smithereens with two blows of his iron stick, the broken pieces flying east and west, and led his pigs into the Dev's garden. He turned them loose to feed on the melons, and stretched out under a shady fruit tree to take a nap.

The Black Dev came back at mealtime and saw that somebody had broken into his house, and pigs had ruined his garden. 'Who dares do this?' he roared out, and ran madly around the garden, looking for the trespasser. He found the Swineherd sleeping under a tree.

'Hey, you earthborn mortal, wake up!'

The boy pretended not to hear him.

'The snake dares not crawl into my garden, no bird dares fly over it, and you trespass?'

Apples of Immortality

The Swineherd yawned. 'Can't you be decent enough to let me enjoy my nap before we fight?'

'When I get through with you you'll be nothing but mincemeat, and the biggest piece left of you will be your ears.'

The Swineherd sprang to his feet. 'Stand back,' he ordered.

'Who strikes first?' the Dev asked.

'You strike first. I am your guest.'

The Dev cast his mace, and the Swineherd was lost in the dust storm raised by the resounding blow.

'I wish I had broken my arm before throwing my mace,' the Dev said. 'I could have at least eaten his ears.'

'It's now my turn,' the Swineherd said, as the dust cleared. 'I am not dead yet.'

He struck with his iron stick at the base of the monster's neck, and the Black Dev's head is still spinning in the sky.

The Swineherd strolled around whirling his iron stick and entered the monster's house. He saw ten armed horsemen in the stable, all dressed in black.

'Who are you?' he asked them.

'Prisoners of the Black Dev,' they answered. 'If you let us go free we promise to come to your aid any time you need us.'

'But remember, the Black Dev's horse is mine,' the Swineherd said. He tied a suit of black clothes on the saddle of the monster's horse, thinking he might wear it some day: then plucked a hair from the tail of each horse in the stable and told their riders they were free to go. They thanked him and galloped off, taking the monster's horse with them. The Swineherd went home with his pigs and saw that the whole city was celebrating with drums and bagpipes.

'What's going on?' he asked.

'The king's daughter is marrying the king's son who arrived here recently from another land,' they told him.

He led his herd to the pigsties and went to his room. The king's youngest daughter came to his hovel.

'What do you want?' he said.

'I just came to have a talk with you.'

'I am nothing but a swineherd, why should you want to talk with me? Or did you come here because you like the smell of pigs? Go away.'

The king's daughter went away crying, and then came back with a tray of food and rapped on his door. He got up and opened it.

'What is it now?'

The Swineherd

'I brought you some good things to eat. Let's have our supper together.'

'I told you not to bother me.' He took the tray and pushed her out of his hovel. She went away crying.

The next morning the Swineherd was on the king's balcony banging away with his iron stick.

'What do you want, fellow?'

'Give me another copper to buy nuts.'

They gave him the coin he wanted, and he took his herd to pasture. When he came back at sundown he found the whole city in panic.

'What happened now?' he asked.

'The devs have come in force and are demanding the king's eldest daughter. The king is gathering his troops to fight them.'

The king's youngest daughter was back at his door weeping loudly.

'What are all these tears for?'

'The devs are taking my sister away.'

'Well, why tell me about it? What can I do?'

'You can save her.'

'Look here, I am just a swineherd, and I have plenty to do as it is, trying to take care of the king's pigs. Why don't you ask her husband to save her? He is a king's son.'

'He can't fight.'

'Go away, leave me alone, I can't be bothered with the devs.'

And the princess went away weeping.

The next morning the Swineherd was banging away on the balcony again, while everybody was in tears and crying, 'The devs are here, what shall we do?'

'I am in a hurry,' he said to the king's servants. 'Give me my copper and I will be on my way.'

He pocketed his coin, bought his nuts, and was off to the pasture with his pigs. He turned them loose in the meadow, then took the horse hairs out of his pocket and burned them. The ten mounted warriors he had set free came galloping back with the Black Dev's horse, the black suit of clothes still tied on the saddle. The Swineherd changed his clothes, and dressed in black like the others, sprang on the splendid stallion and led these ten warriors to battle. The king was moving against the devs with all his troops, but the devs were too much for him until the Swineherd led the attack, striking at the foe with lightning speed. Only one monster survived the slaughter. The Swineherd caught him, pulled out his teeth, strung them around his forehead like so many beads, and said: 'Now go tell it all to your master.'

Apples of Immortality

The king wanted to reward these gallant warriors but they turned their horses around and disappeared before he could find out who they were. The Swineherd dismounted, changed back to his own clothes, released his men, gathered his pigs, and returned to the pigsties.

The whole city was rejoicing in the victory with bagpipes and drums, singing and dancing. The Swineherd retired to his smelly hovel. And again the king's youngest daughter came and knocked on his door, carrying a trayful of choice foods and drinks.

'Well, what is it now?'

'I have missed you very much. I brought you your supper. Let's eat together.'

'I told you not to bother me. Go away.'

He took the tray, pushed her out of his hovel, and shut the door.

The princess went home crying.

The next morning the Swineherd received another copper coin, filled his pockets with nuts, drove his pigs to pasture, and entered the land of the Red Dev. He smashed the gate of this monster's mansion with two blows of his iron stick and sent the pieces flying to Aleppo and Chinma-Chin. Then he turned his pigs loose in the garden and lay down under a fruit tree to take a nap.

The Red Dev came back at mealtime and his blood boiled when he saw his gate smashed and his garden ruined by pigs. He ran around looking for the culprit and saw the Swineherd sleeping under a tree.

'Hey, you earthborn mortal, wake up!'

The Swineherd opened his eyes and saw the Red Dev towering over him.

'I need my rest, you fool. Why did you wake me up? How stupid can you be?'

'You dare talk to me in that angry voice after all the damage you have done? My teeth are just aching for some human flesh. You'd make a fine meal.'

The Swineherd stood up with his iron stick. 'Stand back and strike!' he ordered.

The Red Dev cast his mace and the Swineherd disappeared in swirling clouds of dust.

'Too bad,' the monster cried. 'Nothing's left of him, and I can't even chew up his ears.'

When the dust settled and the Swineherd could see again he said: 'It's now my turn.'

He swung his iron stick and struck so hard at the base of the monster's

The Swineherd

neck that he sent the huge head flying through the air. It crashed against Mount Ararat, which shook and swayed.

The Swineherd sauntered through the Dev's mansion and saw another group of ten mounted warriors in the stable, all dressed in red.

'Who are you?'

'Prisoners of the Red Dev. Set us free, and we'll come to your aid any time you are in danger.'

The horse of the Red Dev, a fiery charger, the Swineherd claimed for himself. He tied on the saddle a red suit of clothes, thinking he might have to wear it some day, plucked a hair from the tail of each horse, and let all of them go. At sundown he returned to the pigsties with his pigs.

He found the whole town celebrating the betrothal of the king's second daughter. The youngest princess came to his room and said:

'Come, let's go to my house. Tonight everybody is eating, drinking, making merry. What are you doing here all by yourself?'

'Go away. What do I have to do with you? I am just a swineherd, not fit to associate with the king's family.'

'You are my king! I love you.'

'I am staying right here.' He pushed her out of his hovel, shut the door.

She came back with another trayful of food, opened the door without knocking.

'Come on! Get up. Let's eat this food and enjoy ourselves.'

He took the tray and again pushed her out of his hovel.

'Go away! This is no place for you.'

The next morning he was back on the balcony, bang! bang! to get his copper coin. And munching his nuts he took his pigs to pasture. In the evening he found the whole town in panic.

'What happened?'

'The devs are coming tomorrow morning to take the king's middle daughter away,' people told him.

The youngest princess came to his hovel with tears in her eyes. 'I rely on God in heaven, and on you on earth,' she said. 'I know you rescued my eldest sister from the devs. You must save my middle sister also.'

'Get out! Why don't you go to your royal brothers-in-law? I am just a swineherd. Let me alone.'

'My royal brothers-in-law! They can't do a thing. You are the only one who can save my sister.'

He put her out of his room. She went away weeping.

The next morning he took his pigs to the open fields, burned the horse

Apples of Immortality

hairs he kept in his pocket, and the horse of the Red Dev came galloping to him with twenty mounted warriors on its heels. Wearing the red suit of clothes, the Swineherd led these men to battle.

The king, waiting for the Devs to attack, saw a cloud of dust rising over the plain and said to his troops, 'Cheer up, men, we are saved. These brave riders are coming to our aid.'

They shot past the king's army like streaks of fire. The foe was quickly smashed. The Swineherd cut the ears off the lone survivor and said: 'Now go tell it all to your master!'

The twenty-one warriors turned their horses around and galloped off before the king could thank them for their gallantry in battle.

'I wish I knew who they are,' he sighed.

That evening when the Swineherd came back with his pigs the whole town was celebrating the victory. The king's youngest daughter came running to his hovel and said:

'Come on, let's go to my rooms. Let's eat, drink and make merry. Can't you see the whole town is eating, drinking and making merry?'

'No, no, I know my place, I am just a swineherd, don't try to drag me to your rooms. I am not going anywhere. I am staying right here.'

'I love you with all my heart. Why should you stay in this filthy hovel?'

'Let me alone. A swineherd doesn't belong in your company.'

The princess went away shedding bitter tears, and came back with another trayfull of food. 'If you will not come to my rooms, then we can at least eat in your room.'

'Go away, I said. You can't eat in this smelly place.'

'I don't care, my dear, how bad it smells as long as I am with you.'

He put her out, shut the door. The princess went away weeping.

The next morning he took his pigs to pasture and entered the land of the White Dev, smashed the gate of the monster's mansion with his iron stick that weighed a thousand pounds, and turned his pigs loose in the garden. Then he washed at a spring and stretched out under a tree to take his nap. The White Dev came at meal-time and his brain reeled when he saw his gate smashed, and pigs feeding on his melons. They had made a mess of the place and were still digging around in his garden. The White Dev looked for the trespasser and found him sleeping under a tree.

'Hey, Earthborn mortal, wake up!' The earth shook as the monster stamped his foot.

'Can't you be a little more considerate and let me have some sleep?'

The Swineherd.



the Swineherd said. 'Why are you so angry and what are you shouting about?'

'I haven't eaten a man for seven years. Get up and fight.'

The Swineherd stood up, holding his iron stick. 'Stand back and strike!' he ordered.

The White Dev took a few steps backward and cast his mace. The Swineherd disappeared in the dust.

'Too bad,' the monster sighed. 'I drove him into the ground and nothing's left to sweeten my teeth.'

'Stop bragging!' the Swineherd said, as the dust settled. 'Now it's my turn.'

He whirled his iron stick over his head and struck the monster at the base of his neck, severing his head. It's still rolling away. He strolled into the house and saw ten white horsemen.

'Who are you?'

'Prisoners of the White Dev. Set us free, and we will come back any time you need us.'

He tied a white suit of clothes on the back of the Dev's horse, plucked a hair from the tail of each horse and let them go. Then he went home with his pigs.

The king's youngest daughter came running to his hovel and cried: 'Please come to my rooms!'

'How many times do I have to tell you that I am not going to your rooms? I am a swineherd, you are a king's daughter, and we two don't match.'

Apples of Immortality

'O my beloved, you are dearer to me than my father and mother. I'd gladly sacrifice my life for you. I love you so very much that you are like the whole world to me.'

'Go away, don't give me a headache with such words.'

He put her out again, and the princess went away weeping.

She came back with another food tray, loaded with good things to eat. 'You just leave the tray here and go,' he said.

'I am not going away even if you kill me!'

He pushed her out.

The next day when he came back from the pasture the city was again in panic. The king's youngest daughter ran to the pigstie with tears in her eyes, opened the door of his hovel and threw herself at his feet. 'You saved my two sisters, and now you will have to save *me* from the devs!' she cried.

'I don't care if the devs are back. It's none of my business what they do.'

'You are the only one who can save me!'

'Why do you come to me? Why don't you ask the king's sons to save you?'

'The king's sons are worthless. You have that iron stick and I know you can fight. They can't. I have no use for kings' sons.'

He put her out once more, shut the door.

She came back with another food tray.

'You have no more pride than a gypsy,' he said.

'Well, you have to eat, and I want to eat with you.'

He finally consented to sit down and eat with the princess. She swallowed her pride, and ate her food with tears in her eyes.

'Why are you crying now?'

'I told you the devs are coming to take me away tomorrow morning.'

'As they took away your sisters . . .'

'Don't you want to save me?'

'I will save you, of course, but you must not breathe a word about it to anyone. You must keep it to yourself.'

The princess went back to her rooms, and the queen was amazed to see her smiling and laughing. 'What happened,' she asked. 'The devs are coming back and will take you away tomorrow morning, and you don't seem to care.'

'Mother, I am not worried any more, I am saved. He promised to save me.'

'Who promised to save you?'

The Swineherd

'He who saved my sisters.'

'And who is he?'

'You won't tell anyone?'

'I won't.'

'Our Swineherd.'

'No! What are you saying, my daughter?'

'God is my witness I am speaking the truth. Our Swineherd saved them.'

'I'll go talk to him, ask his help.'

'Don't. If he knows I told you, he will kill me, and kill you too. This must remain a secret between us.'

The next morning the king marched against the devs with his entire army, and glanced anxiously toward the mountains to see if any horsemen were coming to his aid this time. He didn't have to wait long. A white horseman came racing toward him with thirty mounted warriors.

'Cheer up, men, and make way, make way for these brave riders!' the king cried out to his troops. They shot past the king's army and routed the monsters. What a slaughter! Only one dev was left alive when the battle was over. The man who commanded these warriors cut off this monster's ears and nose and said: 'Now go tell it all to your master.'

The warriors turned their horses around and rode back before the king could stop them, but their gallant commander stayed behind and slowed down to a canter. The king ran to kiss the muzzle of the white horse, then pulled down the rider's head and kissed him also on the forehead.

'My kingdom is yours,' the king said. He saw that the warrior's arm was bleeding. He took out his handkerchief and tied it around the wound. The Swineherd in the white clothes dug in his spurs and flew away on his white horse before the king could recognize him.

He turned his horse loose, gathered his pigs, and went home. He saw the great rejoicing in the city, with drums and bagpipes, with fireworks, and feasting and singing and dancing. The king's youngest daughter brought him a tray of choice foods and drinks and they toasted each other and had a merry time together.

The king told his wife how a gallant white horseman came with thirty warriors and slaughtered the devs, how he bandaged this warrior's arm, and how this fearless hero escaped before he could even learn his name.

The queen laughed out loud.

'Why are you laughing?'

Apples of Immortality

'Your gallant white horseman is our own Swineherd.'

'No! What are you saying?'

'That's the truth. Call him tomorrow morning and ask him.'

The king sent for the Swineherd at once and saw that the boy's arm



was bound with his own handkerchief under the dressing. 'What is this? I don't understand it,' said the king.

'When the king's son becomes a swineherd, and the chamberlain's son becomes a king's son, then the king's son will behave like a madman, as I have done. If you do not believe me call your royal son-in-law who arrived here with me and see if he is not wearing my own armband.'

The king summoned his son-in-law and saw that the royal armband he wore was indeed the Swineherd's. He clapped his hands. 'Executioners!'

The executioners came in and bowed.

The king removed the royal armband and returned it to the Swineherd. 'My youngest daughter also belongs to you,' he said. 'Take her as a gift from me.'

The wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights. Five days later the king's son took his bride and went back to his own country. His father was dead, and he ascended the throne as the new king.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

ROSE-MAIDEN

Once upon a time there lived a man and his wife who were so poor that they did not have a friend in the world. 'I go to church and they turn me out,' cried his wife. 'I enter a neighbour's house, and they show me the door. We would be better off living somewhere in the mountains, away from all these heartless people.'

They took their few belongings and moved to a mountain cave.

'All because of bad neighbours,' sighed the husband.

'Thank heaven, no more neighbours,' said his wife.

'But we still have to eat, you know. I have to go to the nearest town to find work.'

'May the Lord be with you when you go,' said his wife. 'Remember, you have to please people to prosper. The flattering lamb can suck the milk of seven ewes.'

The husband was gone for a month, and came back with his bag full of foodstuffs. When he saw a giant lying before the cave, he was afraid to enter and wanted to turn back. The giant got up, muttered something, and disappeared. His wife came out of the cave to greet him.

'Don't be afraid, he is harmless,' she said. 'God sent him to protect our new home while you were away working.'

The man was very happy to be back with his wife. He opened his bag and said: 'Look, enough food to last us a month! I am working for a kind master. He pays me good wages, and will let me come home once a month.'

They had a good supper together and went to bed. He was up at dawn, took his bag and went back to work, saying he would be back in a month, and not knowing his wife was with child.

When the time for the delivery came and she was in pain, she said to herself: 'I am all alone here, what shall I do without a midwife?'

But somehow a midwife was in the cave when her child was born. And

Apples of Immortality

the midwife washed the baby, wrapped her up, and put her in bed beside the mother.

The mother said five or six days later: 'Oh my goodness, how can I christen my baby with no parish priest and no godfather?'

Suddenly the parish priest entered the cave with the godfather. The midwife prepared the water, the godfather held the baby in his arms, the priest swung his censer over the baptismal basin and put some holy ointment in the water before the child was immersed in it and named Rose-Maiden. After the ceremony they gave the child back to its mother.

'Now that we have christened this baby let each of us make a wish,' said the midwife.

'You make the first wish,' said the priest.

'May God turn the water to silver and gold each time Rose-Maiden takes her bath,' the midwife wished.

'And may God turn her tears to pearls when she cries,' said the priest.

'May God strew the ground with flowers of immortality wherever she walks,' said the godfather.

They made these three wishes and disappeared.

Two days later when the mother was bathing the baby, it seemed to her that the water froze in the tub, and she dumped it in a far corner of the cave. When the baby cried, pearls dropped from her eyes, but the mother thought they were hailstones and swept them off, piling them up in the same corner.

Meanwhile her husband received his wages for the second month and came home with another bag of foodstuffs on his shoulder. He saw the same mysterious giant guarding the door of the cave, but he wasn't afraid this time, and the giant let him pass. The man found his wife lying in bed with a baby beside her, and was overjoyed to learn he was a father. He took the baby in his arms and said: 'Wife, who helped you deliver this bundle of light?'

She said: 'I wasn't alone, thank heaven. There was the midwife with me when I needed her, and later the priest and the godfather also came to christen our baby. They named her Rose-Maiden.'

They sat down and had a good meal together. They played with the baby, and then went to sleep.

He was up at dawn—may the morning light shine upon you!—and saw a pile of something white glistening in a corner. 'Where did all this ice come from?' he said, and began packing his bag with what he thought was ice. 'I'll take this ice to my master,' he said. 'In hot weather like this he enjoys sipping his wine with a little ice in it. He asked me if we have

any snow left here in the mountains, and I was wondering where I could find some ice for him.'

'I can't understand it,' said his wife. 'I was giving the baby a bath when suddenly the water froze in the tub. And when the baby cried, the floor was covered with these hailstones.'

He swung his bag over his shoulder and went back to work.

His master was not at home and he kept his bag in the cool basement so that the ice in it would not melt. When his master came home, he opened his bag and took him a handful of what he reckoned to be ice.

'Where did you get this? Do you have any more of this?' the astonished master asked him.

'I have plenty more in my bag.'

'Let's see it.'

They went to the basement and the man opened his bag.

'Good heavens, man, you call this ice? What you've got here is gold and silver and pearls. Son, I have no right to this treasure. It is all lawfully yours. Let's go to the bazaar and turn it to cash.'

When they came back from the bazaar the servant was a rich man.

'You don't have to work for me any more, go home and enjoy your wealth,' said his master.

The man took his money and walked back to the cave. 'Wife, that wasn't frozen water and hailstones, but gold, silver, pearls!' he cried. 'This bag is packed full of money and we don't have to live in this cave any more. We can go back to town and live in a mansion. Friend and foe alike will go blind from envy when they see our mansion.'

'We can build our mansion right here, over this cave,' she said. 'May God save us from neighbours. It has been so peaceful here without neighbours.'

The man hired master craftsmen and workers and built a mansion over the cave. Rose-Maiden grew up in this mansion, and she grew much faster than other girls, so that at fifteen she was a tall willowy maiden in full bloom. Flowers of immortality sprang at her feet when she walked, and wherever she went she left a train of roses and violets behind her. Her face glowed like the full moon, and she seemed to say to the moon: 'Stand back and let me come out and shine in your stead.' Her hair, shining like pure gold, reached down to her ankles. Her speech flowed like honey from her rose-red lips.

One day the king's son happened to be hunting in the neighbourhood of the mansion with the chamberlain, and they found nothing to shoot all day. Then they spotted a deer and spurring their horses went after

Apples of Immortality

it as it bounded off and disappeared somewhere around the palatial house on the mountain. They rode up to the gate and wanted to search the grounds, hoping to find the deer that escaped. An old man sitting at the gate said: 'I saw no deer.' But he let them in, and wondered if it was a deer they were really after.

They searched for the deer all over the place and could not find it. But they saw Rose-Maiden, bunches of roses and violets blooming about her feet as she walked. The king's son could not take his eyes off such a beauty.

'There is my deer !' he said.

The chamberlain's blood froze in his veins. If you had stuck a dagger into his heart you couldn't have drawn a drop of blood. He wanted the prince to marry his own daughter. But the prince lost no time in asking for Rose-Maiden's hand, and the old man, her father, said: 'You will have to ask her first.'

Rose-Maiden's answer was 'Yes.'

The prince was a headstrong youth and he wanted to take her to his father's palace and marry her at once, but the chamberlain told him not to be so rash. 'That wouldn't be quite proper. We have to tell the king and seek his advice before you marry that girl.'

The king's son bade Rose-Maiden farewell, mounted his horse and assured the girl he would soon be back. He and the chamberlain rode off at a fast trot.

'I have found the maiden I want to marry,' the prince said to his father. 'There isn't another girl like her. She is the only one for me.'

The king had a confidential talk with his chamberlain and questioned him about the girl his son was so enamoured with.

'You will see her,' the chamberlain said with a leer. 'A wild mountain girl born in a cave.'

The king's son was determined to marry the maiden of his choice, and rode back with the chamberlain and with an escort of mounted troops, with drums and bagpipes, to fetch her as his bride. The chamberlain's daughter went along with the groom's party, disguised in man's clothes. Rose-Maiden's father gave a big feast for them, and they left the next morning with the blessings of the old man. 'May you grow grey together on the same pillow,' he said, as he saw them off.

It was getting dark on their way back and the chamberlain said to his men: 'No need to hurry. We can camp here tonight and make an entrance tomorrow morning to let our people see the royal bride and rejoice with us.'

Rose-Maiden

The chamberlain got all of his men dead-drunk. He deceived Rose-Maiden and led her to a spring near the camp. 'Sit down here, my dear, and wait for me,' he said. 'I'll be back with a reliable person to guard you. Our men are a bit unruly tonight.'

The chamberlain returned with his own daughter. They overpowered Rose-Maiden and while he held the poor girl by the arms he said to his daughter: 'Take off her clothes and wear them yourself!' His daughter cast off her male garb and wore Rose-Maiden's bridal clothes. Then she drew her dagger and put out Rose-Maiden's eyes, and thrust the eyeballs into her pocket. They left her naked and bleeding by the spring, and the chamberlain's daughter crawled into the royal tent and lay down beside the king's son. All the men lay around in drunken stupor, and nobody knew what happened.

They got up in the morning and continued their journey. They entered the king's city with drums and bagpipes playing lively wedding tunes. And by the king's order the wedding was celebrated for seven days and seven nights.

A day or two later the king's son said to his wife: 'Walk around a little and let me see flowers springing from under your feet.'

She found excuses not to show her talent and he became suspicious. She displeased him so much that he struck her almost every day. Hearing his daughter's screams the chamberlain went to the king and said: 'Didn't I tell you she is a wild one? We should never have brought her here. But now that she is your son's wife it's a disgrace to beat her. People are talking about it. These beatings must stop.'

Let the king's son beat the chamberlain's daughter a thousand times a day for all we care, and let's see what happened to Rose-Maiden meanwhile. A merchant happened to be travelling along the same road and sat down by the same spring to eat his lunch. He threw a piece of bread to his dog, and the dog picked it up and disappeared behind the bushes. When the dog came back the merchant threw it another piece of bread, and the dog trotted off with the bread between its teeth. The merchant asked one of his men to follow the dog as he threw it another piece of bread.

The man ran back crying, 'Master, the dog has been taking the bread to an eyeless girl stripped of her clothing.'

The merchant was kind to her. 'My poor child, where are you from?' he asked.

Apples of Immortality

'I am from the king's city,' she said.

'I am on my way to the king's city. I'll be glad to take you home.'

She travelled with the merchant's caravan. 'I can find my way home,' she said, as they entered the city. She knocked on the door of a small house, and the merchant went on his way.

An old woman opened the door.

'Who are you? What do you want?'

'Nanny, will you let me stay with you?'

'O my dear child, I am a poor old woman living alone, how can I keep you in my house?'

Rose-Maiden reached into her pocket, and when the old woman saw a handful of gold coins she said: 'Come in, my dear, come in.'

'Nanny dear, don't be afraid of me. I won't give you any trouble. I'll make you rich, you'll see. And now, may I have a bath?'

The old woman grabbed her pail and fetched the water for the girl's bath. She kept fussing around her guest.

'Nanny dear, you'd better leave me alone now while I take my bath,' said Rose-Maiden.

When the old woman came back to empty the tub she was overjoyed to see it filled with gold and silver.

'How did this happen?' she exclaimed.

'Nanny, all you need to get rich is a pair of strong arms to carry the water for my bath. I'll keep turning it to gold and silver,' Rose-Maiden told her.

From then on the old woman could hardly wait to fetch the water for Rose-Maiden's bath. She was off to the fountain early every morning before daybreak, and the gold and silver piled up in her house.

One day Rose-Maiden said: 'Is there an architect in this town?'

'Of course there is.'

'Then have him come over and draw the plans for your great new mansion, with the most splendid façade you ever saw. From now on you and I are going to live in a palace.'

The architect came and drew the plans, and the mansion was built in two months. It was the talk of the town. They furnished it with beautiful rugs and carpets and lived in high style.

'Well, Nanny dear, I hope you are happy and nothing is missing now,' said Rose-Maiden.

'No, my dear child, I cannot say I am happy. Something very important is missing in this house, and I think about it day and night.'

'What is it, dear? Tell me.'

Rose-Maiden

'Your being sightless grieves me no end and is more than I can bear. How can I ever be happy when you can't see?'

'Nanny dear, I had a strange dream last night. I saw myself at a spring with you and I heard two doves talking about restoring my eyesight, would you believe it? There must be, it seems to me, such a spring around here.'

'I can take you to a wonderful spring where we shall sit in the shade of tall plane trees and enjoy the air and the view.'

They went to this spring the next morning, and Rose-Maiden dangled her feet in the water and laid her head in Nanny's lap. The old woman was tired, and both fell asleep. Rose-Maiden saw the same two doves in her dream and again heard them talking about her eyes.

'That's Rose-Maiden, see?' cooed one dove to another. 'The girl who was born in a cave. The chamberlain's daughter put out her eyes and married the king's son herself. She still has Rose-Maiden's eyeballs. Let's drop a feather. The old woman will pick it up for her. Then she can go out and sell her flowers for a pair of eyes. Once Rose-Maiden rubs our feather over her eyes she will see again.'

The doves flew away, and Rose-Maiden woke up and shook the old woman. 'Nanny, get up, you have slept enough. See if you can find a dove's feather under these trees. I need it.'

The old woman got up and searched for the feather, found it, and gave it to Rose-Maiden. They went home.

'Now watch me walk, and follow in my footsteps gathering the roses and violets you will see blooming at my feet. Tie them up in bunches and go out and sell them for a pair of eyes. That's the price for these flowers,' Rose-Maiden said to the old woman.

The old woman filled her basket with roses and violets, tied them up in attractive bunches, and went out to sell them in the streets. They were flowers of the rarest beauty, flowers of immortality, and it was not the season for roses and violets, so she knew they would fetch a high price, but who had an extra pair of eyes to give her? People thought she was mad. Then a window opened in the king's palace, and the royal bride leaned out and called: 'I'll buy your flowers!'

The old woman said: 'I'll sell them only for an extra pair of eyes.'

The royal bride fumbled for the two eyeballs she still had in her pocket and said: 'Here, take these.'

The old woman was very glad to have the eyes and let her have the whole basket of flowers.

Apples of Immortality

Rose-Maiden heard her footsteps and met her at the gate.

'My dear child, I've got them, here they are!'

Rose-Maiden had her eyes back and replaced them in their sockets.

'Now bring me some fresh water from the spring,' she said.

The old woman fetched the water, and Rose-Maiden dipped the feather in it, and rubbed it on her eyes. And lo, she could see again! And as her eyes healed, so did the wound in the old woman's heart.

Let them rejoice in their new mansion while we return to the king's palace.

The king's son was very pleased with these flowers in his wife's chamber. She hung them in bunches on the walls and around their bed, hoping to win his love in this manner. 'Well,' he said, 'these are the flowers I have been looking for. I am sorry I had to be so rude to you to get them. Now walk around and let me see how they bloom at your feet.'

This request always annoyed her and she said: 'Oh please don't rush me so!' It led to another quarrel, and the king's son moved out of her bedchamber and slept in another room.

'Only my Rose-Maiden,' he thought, 'was able to raise such roses and violets.' But if she were still alive, where was she? He was hopeful of finding his lost bride. These flowers were good omens. But for some months there were no further clues and all he could do was to hope and wait.

In this country, every May it was the custom to entrust the keeping of the king's horses to his subjects, who kept them for a few months and then returned them to the king, grown fat and sleek in summer pastures. The old woman told Rose-Maiden about this custom, and Rose-Maiden said it would be a shame if they could not keep at least one horse for the king. By the time the old woman went to the royal stables the king had already distributed his horses and only an old scrubby horse that nobody wanted to keep was left. The king let her take this horse, thinking it would probably die on the road. It was so weak and scrawny that it could hardly stand on its legs.

'Did you bring the horse?' Rose-Maiden asked.

'Yes, I got one, but it looks worthless. And we have no oats, no barley, no hay, nothing to feed it. It won't be easy to keep this horse.'

'You leave that to me,' said Rose-Maiden. 'God is merciful. We'll manage.'

The horse grazed at her feet, followed her around, and in a few months



became a fiery steed. When the time came to return it to the king's stables the king's son came to take it back.

'Nanny, I believe you have been keeping one of our horses,' said the king's son.

'Yes, it's here, the mightiest horse you ever saw. It plays with the stars.'

The king's son went into the yard and what did he see? A fiery steed following Rose-Maiden and feeding on bunches of roses and violets growing at her feet as she led it by the bridle. The king's son went mad with joy. They recognized each other, and embraced.

Rose-Maiden told him what the chamberlain and his daughter had done to her. And he went home and told it all to his father.

'You scolded me for marrying a wild mountain girl born in a cave, and kept repeating, "Don't blame us for it, you married her of your own free will, I wanted you to marry the chamberlain's daughter." Well, father, you will meet her now, my wild mountain girl, my own true bride. Now order that carpets be spread from here to the old woman's house.'

The carpets were spread by the king's order. The chamberlain was already half-dead on his feet. Rose-Maiden was led to the king's castle with royal honours, with troops lining the streets, and everyone who saw her went wild over her. Crowds followed her, picking up the roses and violets she shed in immortal bunches behind her, and marvelling at her beauty and grace. The king kissed her on the brow, then kissed his son, and gave them his blessing.

Apples of Immortality

Rose-Maiden and the king's son attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

As for the chamberlain and his daughter, they were tied to the tails of wild mules by the king's order.

Three apples fell from heaven, one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

TALE OF THE LAD WITH GOLDEN LOCKS

In the old, old days there lived a mighty king with a wife and two sons, named Poghos and Petros, and the king's closest friend and adviser was his black arab stablemaster. When the queen died, the king was bowed down with grief, and one day, after five years of mourning, he summoned his stablemaster and said: 'Saddle two horses. A bit of fresh air might lessen my grief.'

They were riding along the outskirts of the city when they saw three pretty sisters filling their pitchers at a public fountain. Their looks and gay chatter attracted the king's attention and he overheard them talking about him.

'If I were to wed the king I'd weave him a carpet so big that half of it would be large enough for his whole army to sit on,' said the eldest sister.

'If I were to wed the king I'd make him a tent so big that half of it would be large enough to shelter his whole army,' said the middle sister.

'If I were to wed the king I'd bear him sons and daughters with golden locks,' said the youngest daughter.

The king raced back to the palace and summoned his council. The stablemaster went to fetch the three maidens. He found them chattering away at the same fountain. When the stablemaster told them they were wanted at the king's palace they thought it might be their last day on earth, and wondered if they had said something wrong about the king.

The three maidens appeared before the king's council, and the king said: 'It is my desire to wed these three sisters.'

'Are you willing to be my wives?' the king asked the girls.

'We are willing,' they said.

After the wedding the king spent the first night with the eldest sister. 'How big was that carpet you said you would weave for me?' he asked

Apples of Immortality

her. 'Half of it large enough for my whole army to sit on? Did I hear you right?'

'Bring me the wool I'd need for it, my king, and I will weave that carpet,' she answered.

The king saw it was an empty boast.

He spent the second night with the middle sister, and she too had been bragging.

On the third night the king was with the youngest sister. 'Did you speak the truth when you said you would bear me sons and daughters with golden locks?'

'O my king, is this a paint shop? You will have to wait.'

When the time came she did give birth to a son with Golden Locks, and her sisters were so envious that they ordered the stablemaster, who was afraid of them, to replace the newborn baby with a puppy and drown the child in the sea. They rewarded the stablemaster with five hundred silver pieces. And the midwife too received five hundred silver pieces to keep it secret.

Instead of drowning the baby the stablemaster hid it away in a manger, and at midnight he mounted his horse and took the child to a mountain cave, where he intended to keep it. Cloister-of-Flowers was the name of the mountain. The stablemaster returned to the palace that same night and quietly went to bed.

The next morning people came to congratulate the king over the birth of his new son. 'What is there to congratulate you for?' snorted the two sisters. 'She gave birth to a puppy.'

The king was furious and summoned the stablemaster.

'Throw that bitch into the sea!'

The stablemaster hid the queen also in the stable, and returned to the palace two hours later.

'Did you carry out my order?'

'Yes, my king, I drowned her in the sea.'

'Good.'

That night the stablemaster put the young queen on his horse and rode out to the same mountain cave where he kept her baby. She thought he was going to kill her. 'Fear not, my queen, no harm will come to you,' he said. 'You can trust me. From this day on I am your brother. You did not give birth to a pup, as your sisters told the king, but to a fine son with Golden Locks.'

The young queen found her baby in the cave. And the stablemaster took good care of them both, serving the king by day, the queen with

Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks

her baby by night. He brought them food, clothing, everything they needed. When her son became ten years old the stablemaster brought him a bow-and-quiver, and the lad was out hunting every day in the woods and plains. He was a very bright boy, wise far beyond his years. And thus mother and son lived in that mountain cave for fifteen years.

Let us now return to the king.

One day the king said to his stablemaster: 'Saddle two horses and let us go hunting.'

They slung on their swords, took up their maces, and their bows-and-quivers, and mounted their horses.

'Where shall we go?' the king asked.

'We can hunt wherever you like.'

'I'll follow you,' the king said.

They rode off to the Cloister-of-Flowers, where the Lad with Golden Locks was out hunting on that same day, garbed in deerskin, a tight lambskin pulled down on his head. As the Lad raised his bow to shoot a deer two horsemen came galloping toward him, and he decided to wait until they passed. The king himself brought the deer down with an arrow shot from his bow, and the Lad grabbed the fallen deer and ran.

'Shoot him down!' the king ordered the stablemaster, he was so angry.

The stablemaster let an arrow fly over the Lad's head. The Lad got away and disappeared in the cave.

'What happened, why do you look so frightened?' his mother asked him.

'Two horsemen are coming after me. I took the deer they shot and fled.'

The two horsemen rode up to the cave and mother and son met them at the entrance.

'Where is the deer I shot?' the king asked the boy. 'Who gave you the right to take it?'

'May the king live long,' said the youth, 'the game does not belong to him who shoots it, but to him who catches it.'

'How do you know I am the king?'

'Pray come in, and I'll tell you.'

The king felt drawn to this boy. He dismounted and went in with the stablemaster, who pretended not to know the boy and his mother. The king was surprised to see the cave so neat and well kept, and stacked full with every kind of game. The Lad shamed him as a hunter. The king and the stablemaster were served a very good meal of choicest venisons.

Apples of Immortality

After they finished eating the two men rose to go, and the stablemaster brought up their horses. The Lad with Golden Locks said: 'Here is your deer, my king,' and offered it to the king. The stablemaster tied the deer behind his saddle. The king did not mount his horse and lingered at the door of the cave. The boy stirred his feelings and it gladdened the king's heart just to look at him.

'What shall we do with this fine boy?' the king asked the stablemaster. 'Leave him here, or take him with us?'

'May the king live long, I have a confession to make. Do you remember what those three sisters you married promised when we overheard them talking at the fountain? Well, the youngest sister did keep her promise, and bore you a son with Golden Locks. Her envious sisters gave me five hundred silver pieces and ordered me to drown your son in the sea. And they gave five hundred silver pieces to the midwife to keep it secret. They made you and the child's mother believe she gave birth to a pup when after her delivery the queen found a pup lying in her bed beside her. I did not drown your son. I hid him away in a manger and then I brought him to this cave. And I also saved his mother's life when you ordered me to drown her in the sea, though I knew I was risking my neck by disobeying your orders. O my king, this fine boy you met today is your own son, and this woman is your own wife.'

The stablemaster pulled off the lamb-skin the Lad wore on his head, and let the king see his son's Golden Locks. The king could scarcely believe his eyes and ears and asked the queen to forgive him.

'I do not know how to repay you for your great kindness,' the king said to the stablemaster. 'Bring two more horses from the palace. My wife and my son are going with us.'

The stablemaster raced back to the palace and said to the king's two sons: 'I have very great news for you! Your brother with Golden Locks and his mother, the queen, are both alive and well, and will soon be home with the king.'

The two older sisters gasped when they heard the news. The stablemaster rode back to the cave with two horses in tow, and the king, the queen, the Lad with Golden Locks arrived at the palace, crowded with well-wishers, and received a regal welcome. The Lad brought along his bird of truth, which was the only company his mother had when he went out hunting. When the older sisters came into her room—seven days later—to say they were sorry, the bird of truth broke its glass cage and flew out the window.

Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks

'My bird ! I lost my bird ! It flew out the window,' cried the Lad with Golden Locks.

The king said : 'Don't worry, son, your bird will be caught and brought back.' Then he turned to the two older sisters and said : 'That bird flew away because of you. Get out of my sight. I don't want to see you again.'

And both women were expelled from the palace.

Poghos and Petros said : 'We will catch our brother's bird and bring it back.'

First it was Poghos who rode off with forty warriors. They rode on until dark, and then camped on a plain where they cooked and ate their supper, and lay down to sleep. Poghos and his men sprang to their feet when they heard a shriek in the middle of the night, and thinking somebody was being robbed, they remounted and galloped in the direction of the cry. They heard the same cry again—it was the cry of a partridge—and the king's son turned into stone with his forty men. But Poghos could still see with one eye.

Seven days later Petros said : 'My brother didn't come back. Let me go after him and see what happened.'

The king let Petros go after his eldest son, and Petros also rode off with forty warriors. They too camped at the same place and heard the same shriek in the middle of the night. They remounted and went to investigate, and they too turned into stone.

The Lad with the Golden Locks wanted to go after his two older brothers and bring them home. The king said : 'If something happens to you too, who will replace me on the throne?'

'I must go find them,' the youth insisted.

'Take a thousand men with you,' the king said.

'Father, I am not going to war ! The stablemaster will be enough.'

'King's son, I am at your command,' said the stablemaster.

'We shall need about twenty pounds of parched crushed wheat,' said the young prince.

And the two said goodbye, mounted their horses, and rode off. They too camped at the same place, and the youth ordered the stablemaster to scatter the crushed wheat around the camp before they ate their supper and lay down to sleep.

Later in the night the stablemaster saw a fox steal into the camp and eat the grain. He reached for his bow and said :

'King's son, a fox is eating the crushed wheat, shall I shoot it?'

'No, don't shoot a hungry fox, let it eat all it wants.'

Apples of Immortality

About two hours later the stablemaster spoke again. 'King's son, I see the fox is sitting on your coat. Shall I shoot it?'

'No, the poor thing found a soft spot to sit on.'

Shortly before daybreak the stablemaster saw the fox leap to its feet and run away.

'King's son, the fox is running away, shall I shoot it now?'

'No, let it go, and may God be with it.'

When the fox heard these words it turned back and said in a human voice: 'O Lad with Golden Locks, tell me your heart's desire.'

'My heart's desire is to have my two brothers back, and my bird too!'

'Leave your things with the stablemaster and follow me.'

The fox led the youth to the city of birds. 'You'll find your bird in that barn over there, and you can go in and take it, but don't touch any of the other birds,' the fox said.

The youth went into the barn and saw thousands of birds like his own. He thought he might as well take two. And as he reached for the second bird all the other birds in the barn raised an awful hullabaloo about it, and he was seized and taken to the king of birds.

'Why take a bird that doesn't belong to you?' said the king of birds.

'I don't know, human greed, I suppose.'

'You can have two of my birds if you bring me the black horse of the chief of the forty robbers whose hideout is on a mountain called Cloister-of-Flowers.'

The king of birds ordered the prisoner released, and as the youth came out of the barn the fox met him at the door.

'Didn't I tell you to take only your bird and not touch any of the others? Why jump from the frying pan into the fire? Come, follow me.'

The fox led the youth to the mountain where the robbers had their hideout. 'Take only the horse, don't touch the saddle,' the fox warned him.

The Lad with Golden Locks went into the robbers' den and his eyes popped out when he saw the saddle of the chief's black horse. He thought it was worth at least two such stallions. 'What's the use of having the chief's horse without its saddle?' he said to himself, and as he threw the saddle on the black horse the robbers rushed in and caught him. They took him to their chief.

'So you have to have my saddle too,' said the chieftain. 'If you are so very brave I dare you to bring me the maiden that dwells on Mount Aragaz. I'll saddle my horse myself and give it to you as a reward for your courage.'

Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks

As the prince came out of the robbers' den the fox said: 'Why don't you listen to what I tell you? I warned you to take only the horse.'

'Human greed. What can you do?'

'Come, follow me.'

The youth carefully listened to the directions the fox gave him. The road to Mount Aragaz was a perilous one, covered with thorns and thistles, and the fox ordered him to take off his shoes and climb it bare-foot.

'When you see the maiden don't greet her, don't talk to her, say nothing. Just cut a lock of her hair and run. You will hear voices screaming after you, "Catch him! Don't let the thief get away!" Pay no heed to their cries, and don't look back. You'll turn into stone if you look back.'

The youth climbed to the rocky peak in his bare feet. When the maiden saw him she stood up and cried: 'Welcome, O Lad with Golden Locks! I sought you with a lamp in my hand and I found you at last in broad daylight.'

He said nothing. He just cut a lock of her hair and ran. The rocks and woods roared out after him: 'Catch the thief! Don't let him get away!'

The fox was waiting for him.

'Here is a lock of her hair.'

'Give it to me.'

He gave it to the fox, and lo and behold! the fox changed into a pretty maiden.

'I am the fox,' the maiden assured him. 'Now take me to the chieftain. You can leave me with him, mount his black stallion and go. I shall join you later.'

The chieftain was beside himself with joy when he saw her, taking her for the maiden on Mount Aragaz. He ordered his men to saddle his horse and give it to the Lad. The prince sprang onto the black horse and galloped away.

The chieftain tried to embrace and kiss the maiden sitting beside him. She pushed him away. 'What kind of man are you?' she said, freeing herself from his arms. 'Don't you have other wives? I'd like to meet them.'

The chieftain called his forty wives, and they saw that she was prettier than any of them.

'Take her to the garden with you,' the chieftain said.

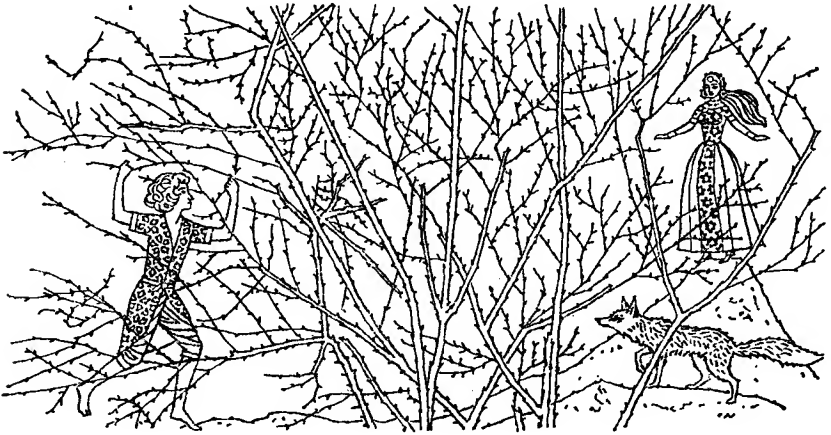
She went to the garden with his forty wives, and jumping over the wall disappeared. She changed back into a fox and caught up with the prince on his way to the city of birds.

Apples of Immortality

'Get off your horse, tie it in this stable and take me to the king of birds,' she said, changing into a horse, a black horse like that of the robber chief. The king of birds was happy to have the horse he wanted, and admired it greatly.

'Give this boy two of my birds and let him go.'

The youth took the two birds, sprang onto the horse he had tied in the stable, and galloped off. The other horse that stayed with the king of birds



kicked the groom, then jumped over the wall, changed back into a fox, and was gone with a swish of its tail. She overtook the Lad with Golden Locks, who rejoined the stablemaster waiting at the camp. The fox led them to where Poghos and Petros had turned into stone.

'O Lad with Golden Locks, what are these rocks, do you know?' the fox asked him.

'I don't know, I am puzzled, they look more like men and horses to me than rocks.'

'These two are your brothers, turned to stone, but they can still see us, and these others are their warriors.'

They heard the cry of a partridge, and all of these bewitched and petrified men came back to life, with their horses. The fox led them back to the camp.

'O Lad with Golden Locks, if it weren't for the crushed wheat you let me eat here you too would have turned into stone like your brothers. Now I must bid you farewell and go my own way.'

The three brothers returned to their own kingdom with the stablemaster and all their warriors, and they brought two birds of truth and

Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks

the black horse of the robber chief with them. The king was overjoyed to see his sons and the stablemaster back safe and sound and gave a great feast in their honour.

A few days later Poghos and Petros said to the king: 'O Father, tomorrow let none but the two of us appear before the king's council.'

The king thought they wanted to lodge a complaint against the Lad with Golden Locks. And when the council met the next day Poghos and Petros stood before their father with hands folded on their breast and said:

'May the king live long, you are too old now to carry on your shoulders these heavy burdens of state. Let our brother, whom we regard as our saviour, sit on the throne in your stead.'

'I am willing,' said the king, 'and I am happy to see you three brothers on such affectionate terms with one another.'

The Lad with Golden Locks said with tears in his eyes: 'Don't ask me to be king. My father is still in good health, my brothers are grown up. I have no desire to be king.'

'We would not care to live without you as our king,' said Poghos and Petros.

'I accept this honour bestowed upon me with a heavy heart,' said the Lad with Golden Locks, 'provided our father continues to reign and I only rule in his name.'

'Good. We agree,' said his brothers.

One day the Lad with Golden Locks summoned his father, his brothers, the stablemaster, the chamberlain and a few courtiers and said: 'Don't you think it is time for us three brothers to marry and settle down? Perhaps, Father, you could find us good wives.'

'You have my consent to marry,' said the king.

'Father, our wives should be three sisters so alike in appearance that no one can say one is prettier than the others.'

'Son, I am ready to carry out your wishes.'

'You can leave tomorrow morning with our stablemaster disguised as dervishes.'

And the next morning the king took off his royal garments and put on the ragged garb of a dervish. He set out on his quest accompanied by the stablemaster, who too was dressed as a dervish. They wandered through the world, and one day they sat down to rest on a threshing-floor at the edge of a town. They saw a shepherd drive his flock back to the fold, and a maiden step out of a hut spinning wool. They thought it was the same

Apples of Immortality

maiden who went in and out three times, not knowing they were three sisters who looked alike.

The shepherd walked into his hut and scolded his wife and daughters for not inviting the two dervishes to rest in his home. He came out of the hut and said: 'Dervish papas, come in and be my guests.'

The shepherd served them a good meal. The stablemaster whispered into the king's ear: 'See? All three are his own lawful daughters.'

That night they stayed in the shepherd's hut, and started for home the next morning. Back in the palace, the king said to his three sons:

'I found three sisters who look so much alike you can't tell them apart, and their father is a shepherd. It is God's will.'

The stablemaster went back to the shepherd's hut with a gift of 5,000 silver pieces from the king, and in three months the shepherd was in business as a merchant. The stablemaster paid him another visit in three months.

'The king wants his three sons to marry your three daughters. Will you give your consent?'

The man took it as a joke and laughed it off.

'I am not joking. That's why I came back, to talk marriage.'

'If the king wants my daughters to marry his sons I give them gladly, nothing would please me more.'

The stablemaster took three engagement rings out of his pocket and put them on a stand by the fireplace. The three sisters came in, picked up their rings, and slipped them on their fingers: the eldest betrothed to the king's eldest son, the middle daughter to the middle son, the youngest to the youngest son.

'This calls for a few drinks,' said their father, and congratulated his daughters. They served a feast. And the stablemaster left the next morning, saying he would be back on May 15th with the king and the wedding party.

And the king went to fetch the three brides with bagpipes and drums and a thousand mounted warriors! The Lad with Golden Locks warned him not to camp within a mile of a spring they would be passing on their way, and the king remembered his son's warning. But on the way back with the three sisters most of his men got drunk and despite his orders camped by this forbidden spring instead of further down the road. The king woke at dawn and saw the whole camp besieged by a dragon. Swords and sabers flashed out of the scabbards. The dragon spoke in a human voice by God's order and said: 'Calm down, men, you can't frighten me with your swords and sabers; they are useless against me.'

Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks

The king bared his head and said: 'My dear dragon, let us go in peace, and I promise to give you anything you ask for.'

'Send me your son with Golden Locks,' said the dragon.

The king was crushed. All his men were dismayed. But the king could not take back his promise. The dragon let them pass, and warned the king not to forget to send him his son with Golden Locks. The king ordered his men not to tell the boy anything about the dragon until after the wedding.

When they reached the palace the king's eldest son stepped forward and took the eldest sister by the hand. Then the middle son stepped forward and took the middle sister by the hand. The Lad with Golden Locks made no move to claim his bride, and the youngest sister remained standing, unwanted by her betrothed.

'She is like a sister to me,' he said. 'I am no longer the king's son. I now belong to the dragon.'

'If she is like a sister to him then our betrothed also are like sisters to us,' said Poghos and Petros, and no wedding took place in the palace.

Seven days later the Lad with Golden Locks bid them all farewell and said: 'Let everyone in the city dress in black for forty days, while I am gone.'

Everybody was in tears, and the youngest daughter cried her eyes out when the Lad went off to the spring where the king had met the dragon. The king had to keep his promise, knowing it would be worse for him if he did not.

The Lad with Golden Locks washed his hands and feet at the spring and lay down to take a nap. And when he woke he saw the dragon standing before him.

'So you did come, my Lad with Golden Locks. Well, we are ready to fly.' The dragon coiled around the boy. 'Close your eyes.' The youth closed his eyes. The dragon soared into the sky with the youth seated on its back.

'Open your eyes, look down on earth and tell me what you see.'

'I see something like a threshing floor.'

The dragon flew higher.

'Have a heart, the sun is burning me, I can't stand this heat!' the boy cried.

'Tell me, what do you see down there?'

'I can't see a thing.'

'We are flying over Chin-ma-Chin. Could you bring me the daughter of the king of Chin-ma-Chin?'

'I will try.'

'You had better, or I will drop you and break every bone in your body.'

The dragon flew down to earth and set him down on the other side of the sea, in Chin-ma-Chin.

'Now be on your way, and good luck,' said the dragon.

The Lad started out for the king's city in Chin-ma-Chin with a sinking heart, and on his way ran into three monsters fighting on a mountaintop.

'This mortal will try to break up our fight,' the monsters said, when they saw him.

The Lad with Golden Locks strode up to the monsters and said:

'What's the trouble? Why are you fighting?'

They said they were three brothers quarrelling over a cap, a key and a tablecloth.

'What's so special about them that you should fight?'

'When you put this cap on your head you become invisible,' they said.

'You can pass by a hundred thousand people, and nobody will see you. With this key in your pocket you can open or close any door you want. And when you spread out this tablecloth you will find it loaded with any kind of food you ask for.'

The Lad with Golden Locks threw three rocks into a gorge and said: 'Now go down to the bottom of this gorge, and when I tell you to come back, run back as fast as you can. The one who comes back first gets the cap. The next one gets the tablecloth. The last one gets the key.'

The monsters scrambled down the gorge.

'Come back!'

They ran back. The youth put the cap on his head and disappeared. The monsters could not see him any more. They swung their arms around hoping to bump against him and knock off his cap, but there was no sign of the youth, he had vanished with the cap, the tablecloth and the key. 'He fooled us,' said the monsters, 'but we have no one to blame but ourselves. We went blind by sticking our own fingers into our eyes.'

The boy tramped across Chin-ma-Chin, and heaven only knows how far he went until he met seven monsters barring his way in a narrow pass where he was trapped between a high wall of rocks and the raging sea.

'It's a long time since we have tasted human flesh,' the seven monsters growled.

The boy wracked his brains for a way out of this tight spot, and decided to try his magic tablecloth. He spread it out and prayed to God. The monsters had all the food they could eat.

Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks

'We haven't had a meal like this in seven years,' they said, and asked the youth what they could do for him.

'Just let me pass,' he said, folding his tablecloth. 'I am on my way to the city of the king.'

And the monsters not only let him pass but gave him a tuft of their woolly hair and said: 'Burn this hair any time you need us and we'll come to your aid.'

The boy kept going and ran across so many ants that they would have eaten him alive if he had not spread out his magic tablecloth and prayed to God. The ants too ate all they could and said: 'Thank you, you can go now.' They too wanted to help him and gave him a tiny claw. 'Burn this claw any time you need us,' they said.

Then the youth had to make his way through immense flocks of white birds of prey that would have pecked at him and flown away with bits of his flesh hanging from their beaks if he had not spread out his magic tablecloth again. These birds too were grateful, and gave him a feather, and said: 'Burn this feather any time you need us.'

At last the youth reached the city of the king of Chin-ma-Chin and sat down under a plane tree to rest. He found lodgings in the house of an old woman, and lived with her about a week. Then he said one morning: 'Nanny, go to the king and tell him I want to marry his daughter.'

She said: 'Son, forget it, the king will never give you his daughter. You don't want to lose your head. Stay out of trouble.'

'Oh, you needn't worry about me. You do what I tell you. I want to marry the king's daughter.'

The old woman got up and went to the palace. She sat on the stone bench before the gate. A courtier came out and said: 'What do you want, old woman?'

'My son wants to marry the king's daughter.'

The courtier went in and said to the king: 'A shepherd's wife expects your daughter to marry her son.'

'Let her in.'

The old woman was led into the king's chamber.

'Well, old woman, what is it that you want?'

'My son wants to marry your daughter, and so I came to ask for her hand.'

'If your son wants to marry my daughter he will have to pass a few tests, and I'll cut off his head if he fails. Bring him over.'

The old woman went home and returned with the prince, who wore a kerchief on his head covering his Golden Locks.

Apples of Immortality

'Before I give you my daughter you'd have to do a few feats to prove yourself.'

In the evening the king's men locked up the youth in a room and placed seven roast lambs in seven copper trays before him. 'If you can eat these seven roast lambs tonight the king's daughter is yours, but if you cannot, we will cut off your head tomorrow morning,' they said.

How to eat seven roast lambs in one night? He knew he could not. Suddenly he remembered the tuft of hair the seven monsters gave him. He took it out of his pocket and burned it, then unlocked the door with his magic key. And the seven monsters walked in and cleaned up the seven copper trays, wiped their mouths and went away. The youth locked the door and lay down to sleep.

The next morning the king called his executioner and said: 'Cut off that fellow's head and bring it to me.'

The executioner saw that the Lad had eaten the seven roast lambs and was sound asleep. He hurried back to the king and said: 'He ate them all!'

'That fellow's good looks must have softened your heart.'

The king rose, put on his shoes, and went to the boy's room. He saw that the Lad had indeed eaten the seven roast lambs.

'I wish I had brought some bread with me,' the Lad said, yawning and stretching his arms. 'You don't treat a man to a feast like this without bread.'

The king was speechless with amazement, and let him go home, under guard. His daughter watched the handsome stranger from her window and was sorry for the Lad. The next day the king invited him to dinner, and then he ordered him to be locked up in a large storeroom filled with rye, wheat and millet, all mixed together.

'I want you to separate all this grain by tomorrow morning, if you don't want to lose your head,' the king said.

The youth was stumped again. Then he remembered the ants, and burned the tiny claw they gave him. And the ants crept in through chinks and cracks in the walls, under the door, through the windows, in countless numbers.

'King's son with Golden Locks, what can we do for you?'

'Separate all this rye, wheat and millet for me!'

The ants did it in two hours. The youth spread out his tablecloth and fed them, after which the ants crept out of the room, and he lay down to sleep.

Early the next morning the king came with his executioner to cut



off the boy's head. The Lad would not let them open the door and come in.

'Have an honest Godfearing man come in first and see for himself what I have done,' shouted the youth. 'I am lost if somebody mixes a handful of this grain.'

The king summoned his Godfearing men, and they came and saw that all the grain was separated. 'He will win, he will get the king's daughter,' they said.

And again the king invited him to dinner, and told him the next morning: 'I want you to bring white birds to fight my black birds. If my birds win, you lose your head. If my birds lose, you win my daughter.'

The king's black birds flew in for this fight and blotted out the sun. The youth was at the end of his wits. Then he remembered the feather the white birds gave him, and burned it. The white birds came with a mighty roar of wings. The black birds flew up to meet the white birds, and black feathers clouded the sky as the lifeless bodies of the black birds rained on the ground. Not a single black bird was left alive when the white birds got through with them.

The youth did not spread out his magic tablecloth in the king's presence. 'I owe you a meal,' he said to his white birds, and sent them away.

'May the king live long, do I get your daughter now?'

And the king said: 'You won. My daughter is yours.'

The wedding was celebrated for seven days and seven nights, and they were now man and wife. The Lad drew his sword and put it down on the bed between them.

Apples of Immortality

'What are you doing?' she cried. 'If you only knew how many of my suitors have lost their heads!'

'King's daughter, forgive me, but for forty days we will have to live like brother and sister.'

One day when the youth was alone in the bridal chamber, without the kerchief on his head, the king's daughter came in and saw the room aglow with a golden light. She ran to her father, and cried:

'Come, take a look at your son-in-law!'

And the king, the queen and their daughter rushed to the bridal chamber, but the youth had already covered his head with the kerchief. The princess pulled off the kerchief and the chamber glowed again with the wondrous light of his Golden Locks. The king realized the Lad was of royal birth, the son of a king to whom he paid tribute.

'Forgive me for all the trouble I have caused you,' the king said.

'It is all forgiven. Now allow me to go back to my own country with your daughter.'

The king gave his consent and the couple departed with many costly gifts and a large dowery. On their way they met the white birds that flew down from all sides, so that the ground was alive with them. The youth spread out his magic tablecloth and fed the birds, and they let them pass.

Then they had to cross the land of ants, and the youth fed the ants also, and the ants too let them pass. Then he spread out his tablecloth for the seven monsters, who too had their fill and let them pass. And at last they reached the domain of the dragon. The groom scanned the sky with anxious eyes and hoped his bride would tell the dragon the truth, that they were travelling as brother and sister and not as man and wife. The dragon came sweeping through the sky toward them.

'Why do you keep looking up at the sky?' the bride asked.

'Do you see that dragon? I have to hand you over to him,' he said.

She grew pale, she trembled. As soon as the dragon hit the ground it shed its skin and changed into a handsome youth, who was none other than the bride's own brother! They embraced each other with tears of joy. She told her brother how the Lad with Golden Locks won her hand.

'My father has been very harsh with all suitors of my sister, and he has built seven-storey mansions with their skulls,' the bride's brother told the Lad with Golden Locks. 'I could no longer endure such cruelty and I prayed to God to make me a dragon so that I would live in the skies, away from all those skulls. I sent you to Chin-ma-Chin to fetch my sister not for me, but for yourself. Take her, my sister is yours as your lawful wife.'

Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks

And he put on his dragon's skin again and carried them on his back across the sea and set them down on the other side.

'Farewell, my friend, but remember, before you wed my sister you should wed the shepherd's daughter. Don't neglect her.'

'My dear brother-in-law,' said the Lad with Golden Locks, 'take this cap of invisibility, this magic tablecloth and key, and from this day on let me live by my own wits.'

The dragon took the cap of invisibility, the magic tablecloth and key, and they parted, the dragon soaring into the sky. The youth went on to his father's city with the princess of Chin-ma-Chin. He met a herdsman who shouted at him in an angry voice: 'How dare you enter our city with a maiden in white dress when all of us wear black? Don't you know the whole city has been grieving over the loss of the king's son, the Lad with Golden Locks?'

The herdsman drew his dagger and wanted to slay him on the spot. The Lad struck him in the face so hard that the man ran to the king with a bloody nose.

Then they met another herdsman, and the Lad gave him a gold piece and said: 'Run to the king as fast as you can and tell him his lost son is back.'

The king rewarded both herdsmen, and came out of the palace to meet his son with drums and bagpipes, and to give him a royal welcome. The youngest sister stayed in the palace and sadly watched the ceremony from a window. The Lad with Golden Locks went up to her and said: 'Come, my beloved, I was betrothed to you first, and I shan't shame you now.'

The three brothers married the three sisters at a joint wedding. Then the Lad with Golden Locks also married the daughter of the king of Chin-ma-Chin. The wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, and two for the listeners.

MAGIC CANDLESTICK

A young man living alone with his mother in an old shack found a candlestick while gathering brushwood and took it home with him.

'O my son, you didn't sell any brushwood today,' his mother complained. 'This candlestick will not buy any bread in the bazaar.'

'O my mother, this was our fate today,' said the young Woodcutter. 'Maybe we can use this candlestick.'

He stuck a candle in it, and as soon as he lighted the candle mighty black arabs rushed in, and said: 'O young master, shall we wreck the world, or build it?'

When he removed the candle these men disappeared at once. He stuck the candle in the other socket, and all the houri-peris of the world poured in, dancing, piping, and drumming. He removed the candle, and the houri-peris also disappeared. He put it back in the same socket and the houri-peris came back and a table was set before him loaded with food and drinks. He pulled it out, and the houri-peris vanished with the table.

The Woodcutter learned how to use this candlestick, and the next night he had the black arabs come back.

'O young master, shall we wreck the world, or build it?'

'I want you to build me a palace,' he said, 'all the way from here to the king's gate, and so tall as to cast its shadow over the king's palace.'

These men worked only at night, and the Woodcutter's palace was built in forty nights.

'My God,' the king said when he saw it finished one morning, higher than his own palace, 'where did the Woodcutter get all the money to build it?'

The young Woodcutter stuck the candle in the socket that brought in the black arabs, and they came back in force.

'O young master, shall we wreck the world or build it?'

'I want you to furnish my palace,' he said.

They furnished it beautifully that same night.

Magic Candlestick

Then the next night he stuck the candle in the other socket and the houri-peris came back. They liked the furnishings. They thought everything was as it should be. He put the candle back in the other socket, and the black arabs returned.

'O young master, shall we wreck the world or build it?'

'Bring me the king's daughter,' he said, 'with her bed, her clothes, and everything.'

Well, these men could do anything. They fetched the king's daughter, and no one in the king's palace knew a thing about it. The Woodcutter stuck the candle in the socket that set the table before him, and the houri-peris made merry, feasting and drinking and playing their pipes and drums. The king's daughter awoke at the height of this fairy mirth, rubbed her eyes, and gasped: 'O my God, where am I? Is this real, or am I dreaming?'

The houri-peris lifted her out of bed, dressed her, and had her sit at the table with them. 'What's going to come out of this?' she said to herself, very much confused by what was going on.

The houri-peris ate, drank, played their music, danced with the Woodcutter and the king's daughter, and disappeared at midnight. The Woodcutter was left alone with the king's daughter. She went back to bed, still very much puzzled, and the next thing she knew he was in bed with her.

She said, just before daybreak: 'For heaven's sake send me back the way you brought me here, but don't let the king hear about it. He will chop off your head if he does.'

He got up and stuck in the candle that brought in the mighty black men.

'O young master, shall we wreck the world or build it?'

'Take her back the way you brought her here.'

They whisked her back to her own bedchamber. They brought her again the next night, and the next. This went on for some time and the king saw that the colour was gone from his daughter's cheeks. She was not the same girl, she had changed and he had a horrible suspicion.

He called the queen. 'O my wife, what does this mean?'

'I can't understand it myself.'

'You had better have a talk with her and see what she has to say about it.'

The queen rose and went to her daughter's chamber. 'O my child, what has happened to you? Don't you ever give your father a thought? Does a king's honour mean nothing to you?'

Apples of Immortality

'O my mother,' she said. 'I just can't speak about it. You won't believe it unless you see it with your own eyes. Sleep in my bed tonight, and you will know.'

That night the queen slept in her daughter's bed, and the princess slept in the queen's bed. The Woodcutter's servants whisked the queen away, not knowing she was the mother of the young princess they had been taking back and forth, and after they were gone, the Woodcutter called in the *houri-peris*. They came in, playing their merry tunes. The table was set, and the feast began. The queen awoke, and could not believe her eyes. She watched the merrymaking from her bed, and after the *houri-peris* left, she was left alone with the Woodcutter.

'Young man, is it you who has been bringing my daughter here every night?'

'Yes, my dear mother, I have sinned against you and God.'

'Couldn't you come and ask for my daughter's hand like an honest man?'

'My dear mother, if I had asked for your daughter's hand the king would not have given his consent. But now of course he would be glad to have me marry her.'

'You have my consent and blessings. Now all you need is the king's approval, so please send me back the way you brought me here.'

The black arabs came in at once and took her home.

In the morning the king called the queen to his chambers and said: 'O my wife, what did our daughter tell you?'

'O my husband, I will not bore you with the details. It's something I would not wish on my worst enemy. You have to see it with your own eyes to believe it.'

'See what with my own eyes? What are you trying to tell me?'

'Just sleep in your daughter's bed tonight and you will know.'

That night the king slept in his daughter's bed, and the Woodcutter's servants whisked him off, not knowing it was the king. The *houri-peris* trooped in with all their music and noise and capers. The table was set, and the gay feast began. The king awoke during the feast and watched them, dumbfounded. After the *houri-peris* were gone he was left alone with the Woodcutter.

'So it's you,' the king said, and drawing his sword wanted to slay him on the spot. The Woodcutter quickly lighted his candle and his black arabs rushed in, wiping their naked swords on the palms of their hands.

'Well, master, what shall we do? Just give the word, and we'll do it.'

'I want you to protect me from this king.'

Magic Candlestick

These mighty men turned to the king. 'Well, are you willing to give him your daughter, or shall we strike your head off?'

'Young man, I'll give you my daughter, but first let me go home, please.'

They took the king back to the palace.

The queen ran to him in the middle of the night and asked: 'Tell me what happened!'

'What shall I tell you? I saw it, and I promised him my daughter. What else could I do?'

'You did the right thing. They are both young; let them marry.'

They invited the Woodcutter to their palace. Then they invited all their friends to the betrothal ceremony, followed by the wedding, which lasted for seven days and seven nights. After the wedding, the bride was ceremoniously led to the groom's mansion.

A few days later the king called his daughter back to the palace and said: 'O my child, do you know how your husband became suddenly so wealthy? He used to be miserably poor.'

'He became wealthy through a candlestick,' she said.

'A candlestick, eh? Can you bring it to me?'

She went home and brought him the candlestick. The king had his daughter sit beside him and said: 'Don't go back to your husband. I'll take care of him now.'

He lighted a candle, and the houri-peris trooped in—but this time they came with sharp swords and knives in their hands.

'We came to claim your soul,' they said.

The king stuck the candle in the other socket, and the black arabs rushed in, with even uglier swords than the houri-peris carried.

'Ha, we will cut you to pieces now!'

'Wait! There is a man I must see before you kill me.'

He sent for the Woodcutter, and as soon as they saw him they all turned to him and said: 'O young master, what shall we do, wreck it or build it?'

The Woodcutter removed the candle, and they all vanished from sight.

The king asked the lad to let him light the candle with his own hand to see if they would come back. He did, and the houri-peris came back, without swords. He stuck the candle in the other socket, and the black arabs came back, without swords.

The king said: 'Son, my daughter is yours. From now on you are my lawful heir, and may God bestow upon you my kingdom also, as he gave you my daughter—and this candlestick.'

Apples of Immortality

The king stepped down from his throne and let the Woodcutter be the new king.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

THE BIRD-PERI

Once upon a time there lived a king, and this king had three sons, and went blind in his old age. He summoned all the healers in his kingdom, but not one of them could find a cure for his eyes. In his despair he called his eldest son and said: 'You will have to go and bring me the medicine I need for my eyes, if I am to see again.'

'Go where? I haven't been anywhere,' said his son.

'Go as far as you can, to a land I have never seen myself. Even a little soil from such a land will cure my eyes.'

The young prince led a horse out of the king's stable, mounted, and rode off. He travelled for six months in a barren desert country until he came to a spring flowing by a dead tree.

'At last some water, thank heaven,' he said. 'But it's very strange that a tree growing so close to water should dry up and die.'

He looked for a shady spot but couldn't find any. So he threw his felt cape over the dead tree and slept under it. When he awoke he saw that the tree had turned green and was loaded with apples, each weighing about a pound. He packed his saddlebags with these apples, drew enough water from the spring to fill five or six bottles, and started for home. 'I will take these to my father,' he thought. 'I am sure he has never been here himself.'

It took him another six months to get back, and people congratulated his father for his son's successful journey. The old king heaved a deep sigh and said: 'He went empty-handed, came back empty-handed.'

'My dear son, how far did you go?' the king asked the prince.

'Far enough. Not ever your forebears ever saw that land, I'm sure.'

'Well, tell me, where is it?'

'I rode on and on until I came to a spring . . .'

'You needn't tell me the rest, my son. You saw a dead tree, didn't you? You slept under it, and when you woke up the tree had turned green and was loaded with apples. Am I right?'

'That's right, father.'

'Son, I used to have my breakfast tea here in the morning and eat my lunch there at noon on the same day. No, you didn't bring me the medicine I need for my eyes.'

And the king called his second son. 'It is now your turn to go and find the cure I am looking for.'



'But, my dear father, how can I, when my older brother came back empty-handed?'

'We must try again.'

The second son also led a horse out of the stable, mounted, and rode off. In six months he too reached the same dead tree by the spring in the desert and thought to himself: 'My brother came as far as here.' He travelled for another three months and reached a hill covered with topazes, diamonds and other precious stones. 'If my father had ever been here our treasury would be full of these gems,' he thought. He packed his saddlebags with these stones and went home. People congratulated his father, and the king heaved a deep sigh and said: 'Yes, he came back—empty-handed.'

The youth kissed his father's hand, and the king kissed him on both cheeks. 'Well, my son, tell me, how far did you go?'

'My dear father, I am certain no ancestor of ours for seven generations back ever trod the country I went to.'

'Well, tell me, where is it, where you go?'

'I rode as far as a hill ...'

'And you brought me pearls and precious stones.'

'Yes, father.'

The Bird-Peri

‘Let’s see what’s in your saddlebags.’

They opened the saddlebags and found them packed with worthless rocks.

‘Well, son, you tried, God bless you.’

The king called his youngest son.

‘My dear father, I have scarcely been out of this house and I don’t even know the roads. How can I succeed when my two older brothers failed?’ the lad said.

‘Son, there is no other way, we have to try again.’

□ The boy went to the garden and lay down by the marble fountain to think it over. He fell asleep and heard a voice tell him in his dream: ‘Why are you sleeping here, what’s troubling you?’

‘My father expects me to go find a cure for his eyes when I don’t even know where to go and which road to take,’ said the boy.

‘Son,’ said the voice, ‘ask your father to give you his ring, his sword and his horse, and you will be ready for your journey.’]

The boy sprang to his feet and ran to his father. ‘Give me your own horse, your own sword, and the ring on your finger, and I will be on my way,’ he said.

The king embraced his youngest son and kissed him on both cheeks. ‘If I have a truly brave son it’s you, and I know you will succeed.’

The next morning the king gave him his ring and his sword, and said to his chief groom: ‘Saddle my horse.’ The boy mounted his father’s steed and rode off. As his father had done before him, he ate his breakfast at home and his lunch under the dead tree on the same day, and at sundown he rode past the hill of precious stones that turned out to be worthless rocks. Instead of stopping here for the night he kept going, and what did he see? One sun in the sky, another sun on the ground. ‘Praise be to God,’ he said, ‘what country is this? There are two suns here.’

As he spurred his horse and came closer to the sun on the ground he saw nothing but a feather. He dismounted, picked up the feather, and stuck it in his lambskin cap.

‘Throw it away,’ said his horse.

‘Why should I?’

‘That feather can cause you a lot of trouble.’

The horse repeated his warning three times, but the king’s youngest son gave no heed to his words.

‘Well, don’t tell me I didn’t warn you,’ the horse said.

The boy rode on and reached the city of a king who was told by his

Apples of Immortality

informers that a traveller had just arrived with a sun shining in his cap.

'Bring him over,' the king said. 'Let's see who this traveller is.'

The boy was taken to court, and the king asked him: 'Who are you?'

'I am just a traveller visiting your country.'

'What's that you've got in your cap shining like the sun?'

'A feather I picked up on my way.'

'Let me see it.'

The prince removed the feather from his cap and gave it to the king, who went wild over it. 'You may go now,' the king said. 'Thank you very much.'

The king stuck the feather in the wall of his private chamber and couldn't take his eyes off it. He was so busy admiring the feather that he couldn't be bothered with the complaints of his subjects. One day an old woman came in and complained somebody stole her chickens. 'Go away, don't disturb me now, come some other time, can't you see I am busy?' the king said, his eyes fixed on the feather.

'I see, O King, you are admiring that feather. What would you do if you saw the bird it belonged to?'

The king quickly turned to her and said: 'Nanny dear, who can bring me that bird?'

'Whoever brought you this feather can also bring you the bird,' she said.

The king sent for the young traveller who found the feather, and they located him at a roadside inn. 'Maybe the king wants to give me a reward for my feather,' the youth thought. 'He was a bit too excited before to think of a reward.'

The boy bowed before the king seven times and remained standing with hands folded on his breast.

The king said: 'Tell me, my lad, do you know why I called you back?'

'How would I know, O King?'

'I want you to bring me the bird that lost this feather.'

'I have never been in this country before, how can I? I wouldn't even know where to look for it.'

'Either you bring me the bird that lost this feather, or I cut off your head.'

The boy returned to the inn with tears in his eyes. His wise horse saw him crying and said: 'I told you not to pick up that feather. This is just the beginning of your troubles.'

'What shall I do, dear horse? I am really in a tight spot, you have to get me out of it.'

The Bird-Peri

'Well, don't worry. Have a good night's rest and I will do what I can tomorrow morning.'

The boy lay awake all night. He groomed his horse in the morning, saddled it, had a slice of bread for breakfast, and mounting, said: 'Which way shall I go, dear horse?'

'You leave that to me. Just keep the reins loose.'

He let the horse take him wherever it liked and let the reins lie loose upon its neck.

Heaven only knows how far he went before he came to an impassable forest.

'Do you know where we are?' the horse said.

'No, I don't.'

'They call this the Verana-wood.'

The boy dismounted. The horse said: 'Unbuckle the girths of my saddle, take the bridle off my head, and listen carefully to what I tell you. Do you see that tall plane tree over there?'

'I see it.'

'Well, there is a marble pool and fountain under that tree. Dig a pit near the tree and hide in it. Today is Friday. A Bird-Peri comes to bathe in this pool every Friday. You will see this Bird-Peri take off her feather-dress, drop it on the edge of the pool, and plunge in. Then you will see her come out of the water and dress. You must not speak to the Bird-Peri while she is dressing. When she has all her feathers on and is ready to fly away you grab her by the legs and bring her to me.'

The youth did what his horse told him, dug a pit, and was hiding in it when the Bird-Peri flew down and began to undress. She plunged in, splashed around, and then came out of the pool and put on her feather-dress. Just as she was ready to fly away, the boy grabbed her.

The Bird-Peri cried: 'Let me go! You will be sorry if you don't.'

The youth said: 'Dear bird, if I let you go the king will cut off my head, and I am too young to die.'

The Bird-Peri said: 'Well, it's up to you. I just warned you.'

He took the Bird-Peri, mounted his horse, and delivered her to the king. The king took the Bird-Peri and said: 'Thank you, my lad, you may go now,' without giving him a reward.

The boy returned to his lodgings at the inn. The king put the bird in a cage and hung it in his room. The bird remained silent in her cage. Not a sound came out of her. The king said: 'Dear bird, I will give you anything you want if you will only speak to me and let me hear your voice.'

Apples of Immortality

'Good heavens, King, you can go from East to West and you will not find another maiden like me,' said the Bird-Peri. 'If you give me what I want I promise to take off my feathers and become your queen, and all the kings in the world will envy you.'

'Dear bird, just tell me what you want and it shall be yours.'

'I want my maid brought to me. She lives somewhere between the Black sea and the White sea, held captive by the Red Dev. If I can have her back with me I shall be glad to be your queen.'

'Dear bird, who can find your maid?'

'The lad who brought me here can also find my maid, I am sure. I should think it would be easier.'

The king sent for him again, and the young prince thought: 'Oh my God, I have jumped into the fire. What does he want this time?'

He was led before the king and, as was the custom, bowed seven times and remained standing with hands folded on his breast.

'Do you know why I called you back?'

'How would I know, O King?'

'I want you to rescue a maid from the hands of the Red Dev living somewhere between the Black sea and the White sea and bring her to me.'

'How can I, O King, fight the Red Dev hiding himself between the Black sea and the White sea and rescue a maid, when I don't even know how to go there?'

'Don't give me a headache with such lame excuses. You do what I tell you or I will cut off your head.'

The boy went back to the inn, crying.

'Well, what is it now, what happened?' the horse asked him.

'What shall I tell you, dear horse? The devil take this king. He said: "I want you to rescue a maid from the hands of the Red Dev living somewhere between the Black sea and the White sea and bring her to me."'

'Well, stop crying,' said the horse. 'God is merciful. Get some sleep, and we shall see what we can do about that tomorrow morning.'

The boy could not sleep a wink, and only pretended to be asleep. He was up early in the morning, gave his horse another good grooming, ate two slices of bread for breakfast, saddled his horse, and led him out to the gate of the inn.

'Dear horse, which way shall we go now?'

'That is none of your affair. Just keep the reins loose, and leave the rest to me.'

Heaven only knows how far he rode to get to the shore.

The Bird-Peri

The horse said: 'This is the black sea. Do you know how to cross it?'

'Dear horse, how would I know?'

'Do you know what you can do with that sword hanging by your side?'

'No, I don't, I haven't used it yet. It has stayed in its scabbard.'

'That's your father's sword, made of lightning. Draw it out when we reach the seashore, hold the hilt against my forehead, the tip against the water, and the sea will open out before you and let you pass. When you get to the other side you will see a thin smoke curling up from a cave. Stand before the entrance of the cave and call aloud, "Red Dev, come on out and fight." The Red Dev will say, "Come in and have dinner with me." Don't you go in. When you repeat your challenge three times, the dev will come out to fight. You draw your sword and slash off his head. Then you go into the cave, seize the maid, swing her up into your saddle, touch the water with the tip of your sword and the sea will open out again and let us pass, and you can take the maid to the king.'

The boy did what the horse told him, killing the monster, freed the maid, and handed her over to the king.

'Thank you, you may go now,' the king said, without giving him a reward.

The king turned to the Bird-Peri: 'Is she your maid?'

'Yes, she is!'

'Well, I got her for you, so now take off your feather-dress.'

'Good heavens, king, if I take off my feather-dress and you see me revealed in all my beauty you will drop dead. The sight of my beauty without my feathers on will kill you.'

'What shall I do then?'

'Here is what you must do. You must send for the forty fiery mares that live in the Red sea, you must bathe in their milk, and become a peri yourself. Then we can live together as man and wife and have a flock of children who will be peris too.'

'But who will bring me those sea mares?'

'Who? The lad who brought me to you, and who now brought my maid, can also bring the mares, I am sure.'

'Bring that young fellow back before he leaves my city,' the king said to his courtiers.

They found him eating in his lodgings.

'Very well, I will come,' said the youth, 'but let him give me a hot meal at least once in a while. I haven't had warm food for months.'

He ran back to the king, bowed, folded his hands on his breast.

Apples of Immortality

'Do you know why I called you this time?'

'How would I know, O King?'

'I want you to go to the Red sea, where there are forty fiery mares, and bring them all to me. I want to bathe in their milk.'

'You expect me, O King, to capture forty fiery sea mares all by myself?'

'You had better do what I tell you if you want to save your neck.'

The prince went back to his horse, crying.

'What are the tears for this time?'

'May God wreck his home, this king is now sending me to the Red sea to bring him forty fiery mares, so that he can bathe in their milk.'

'Don't worry. the worst is over for you. I'll be the one to suffer. Go back to the king and ask him to have forty camelloads of wool, forty loads of felt, and forty loads of skins sent to the Red sea. Tell him, "I'll go get the mares if you have these supplies ready for me."'

The boy followed his horse's advice, and the king was happy to send these supplies to the Red sea. On their way to the Red sea the horse said: 'They call them the forty mares, but they are really thirty-nine. One of them is my mother, and thirty-eight are my sisters. I was my mother's only son. We quarrelled, we had arguments, and I ran away. It's thirty years now that I have been serving your father. My mother was very angry with me and said, "Ah, if I ever lay my hands on my son, I will tear him to pieces."'

The boy rode on and the horse continued to speak to him: 'When we reach the seashore I'll lie down on the sand, and you cover me first with the wool, then with the felt, then with the skins. Hide somewhere not too far from me. I will neigh a little, and don't be afraid when a storm rises in the sea. My mother will come out of the waves, followed by my thirty-eight sisters. They will stand there and cry their hearts out. Then my mother will run up to me and start pulling the skins off my back. You must not say a word. She will throw off the felt. Keep silent. She will be tired by the time she gets down to the wool, and that's when you have to put your foot in the stirrup and sit tightly in the saddle. She will soar up to the sky to burn you up against the sun. Hide under her belly. She will come down from the sky and throw you off her back as she hits the ground. Get back into the saddle and stay in it like a man. Lash her hard with your whip until the milk she sucked from her mother spurts out of her nostrils, and then say to her, "I am your master". When she knows you are her master she will go wherever you like, and my sisters and I will follow you.'

The Bird-Peri



The boy did what the horse told him, captured all the mares and led them to the king's stables. Then he returned to his room at the inn.

The Bird-Peri said to the king: 'You can now take your milk bath.'

'But who will milk the mares?' the king asked.

'Good heavens, king, why did you let that boy go? He would be the proper person to milk them.'

The youth was summoned to the court. The horse told him on their way: 'Keep me tied in a stall near you. Before you start milking the mares tie a string to your ring and drop it in the cauldron. Then lay your sword across the cauldron. When you finish the milking, take off your clothes and step into the cauldron yourself to take a milk bath before the king does, after which wipe your ring and your sword dry, put your ring back on your finger and your sword back in its scabbard, and tell the king his bath is ready. The king will come and take off his clothes. As soon as he steps into the cauldron the milk will start boiling and scald him to death. He will turn into a ball of melting fat. Dump him into the well, and throw your own clothes after him. Wear the king's clothes and go sit on his throne.'

The boy followed his horse's advice, and the king was scalded to death in a cauldron of boiling milk. The young prince sat on the throne wearing the king's clothes, and nobody seemed to know or care what happened, except the Bird-Peri, who threw off her feathers and became a beautiful maiden. She flung her lovely arms around his neck and said: 'I was working and praying for you all the time and I did it all for your sake, my dear. Now that you are king, I am your queen.'

Apples of Immortality

He reigned for a few months, and then suddenly he began to cry as he remembered his father.

'Good heavens, man, you have a wife like me and you became a king and you are still unhappy? You shouldn't have a care in the world.'

'My darling queen, I love you dearly, and I would gladly sacrifice my life for you, but don't you know that I am the son of a king? My father lost his eyesight. I came all the way here to find a cure for his eyes, and what am I doing? Sitting on a throne. I don't even know whether my father is living or dead. That's why I am crying.'

The queen laughed out loud, and wound her arms more tightly around his neck. 'Your father chased me for ten years and that's why he went blind. But don't worry, I will go back with you, cut my finger, smear a few drops of my blood on his eyes, and he will see again. Come on, let's go.'

The young king summoned all his subjects and entertained them at a great feast. 'I must leave you now and go to another country,' he said to them during the feast. 'I may or may not come back. Thank you very much for being such good subjects. Pick another man to be your king.'

They found a successor, and saw them off. He rode the mother mare and his wife rode his father's horse. They took off their royal garments and travelled in ordinary clothes. When they reached the outskirts of his father's city they met a shepherd and told him: 'Run to the king and tell him his youngest son is back.'

'What is he bringing with him?' the king asked the shepherd.

'Thirty-nine blue sea marès, and a very beautiful maiden.'

'Thank heaven he succeeded,' said the king. 'Give this shepherd a full measure of gold.'

The youngest prince kissed his father's hand and the king kissed him on both cheeks. The lovely princess cut her little finger and smeared a few drops of her blood on the king's blind eyes, and lo, the king could see again. He got up and kissed her on the forehead. Then he took off his crown and put it on his son's head.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale and two for him who heeds the teller's words.

JAN-POLAD: STEEL-MONSTER

A long time ago there was a king who had forty sons. Thirty-nine of them were married, though no one knew what feats of valour, if any, they had performed to win their brides, and the time came for the youngest son also to marry. His name was Patikan. The king gave him his own sword and quiver, a bag of gold, and many servants, and told him to go see the world for himself and prove his mettle before settling down with a wife.

‘May God be with you,’ he said, as he saw his youngest son off.

The young prince galloped away on his black horse. He rode to the ends of the earth. He saw the upper world, and the dark lower world. He fought devs and giants, men and wild beasts, and always came out the victor. At length his money was gone, his servants perished, and he found himself standing before an immense castle of steel and stone that seemed to have been there from time immemorial—the most magnificent castle he had ever seen.

Patikan rode around it, scanned the gates, the windows, and saw no one. ‘O my God,’ he said, ‘whose castle is this? Doesn’t anybody live here?’

He waited for somebody to show up, and at sundown saw a strange figure approaching the castle gate. Almost as broad as he was tall, which made him appear rather short, this Monster was made of steel from head to foot and wore a helmet and boots of shining copper. He carried a huge steel bow, and as he walked, the earth shook and thundered under his feet. He paused before the gate, put his nose in the air, sniffed and said: ‘I smell a man. I don’t have to hunt for this one. He falls into my hands himself.’

He roared out: ‘Hey, you mortal! No fowl can ever fly over my land, no snake can ever crawl into these parts, and you dare set foot on my soil? Come on out, let me see who you are, or I’ll turn you into a handful of ashes.’

Apples of Immortality

Patikan stepped forward sword in hand and stood before the dreadful Monster.

'Who are you?' said the Monster. 'Haven't you ever heard my name? I am Jan-Polad.'

'And I am Patikan. Yes, I've heard of you, and that's why I came here. I've been everywhere, have seen everything, I have killed devs and giants, and I wouldn't mind having a little scrap with you.'

The Steel-Monster glowered, and sneezed. The boy prince was blown away to the other end of the field. But he was a plucky lad, and placing his trust in the Herald of Christ, John the Baptist, he lurched forward with his sword to strike the Monster down. Jan-Polad hissed at him, and the youth was driven back by a stream of flame and fire that belched from this Monster's mouth. Patikan tried to shoot him down, but the Monster did not even seem to feel the arrows that struck his steel body, and flared again with flame and fire.

'You are a brave one, I'd say. Listen, Patikan, no mortal son of Adam can ever enter my kingdom. I am sword-proof, arrow-proof, death-proof. Whether you hit me or not is all the same to me. Can't you see I am made of steel?'

The young prince was nearly frightened to death.

'Patikan, you are helpless against me, but I can see that you are a good fighter. I'll spare your life if you enter my service. You can keep your arms. Nobody can kill me, as I said. And I do not fear death.'

And so Patikan saved his life by becoming the Steel Monster's servant. He lived in the castle with his master. One day Jan-Polad confided in him: 'The whole world dreads me, and I feel no pain, but I ache with longing and desire for the daughter of the King of the East. I tried to abduct her seven times, without success. Maybe you can.'

'I will try,' said Patikan.

'Good. I will give you a horse, I will give you money, arms, anything you need, and I will let you go free when you deliver the young maiden to me. But don't try to run away. You can't. I'll capture you no matter where you go.'

Patikan bade his master farewell and rode off to the Kingdom of the East. On his way, three days later, he saw a lovely dove caught in the thorns of a bush. He freed the dove, instead of killing it. The dove flew away, then flew back and perched on his head.

'King's son,' said the dove, 'I do not know how I can ever return your kindness, but I shall give you one of my feathers and ask you to keep it.'

You may need it some day. When you burn my feather I shall be back with you.'

The dove plucked off a feather with its beak and dropped it to the ground. Patikan picked it up, thinking: 'You can't tell what might happen someday. I may really need this.' He put it in his pocket and continued his journey.

It took him three months to reach the city of the King of the East. Here he changed his clothes, dressed like a native, learned to speak the language, and worked for the king's gardener. The king's daughter saw him from her window and liked his figure and looks. When not working in the palace gardens Patikan strolled around in his best clothes, and the princess admired the lad so much that she even saw him in her dreams.

One day she sent him this message with a servant: 'Come to my window. I wish to speak to you.'

Patikan stood under her window, and when he raised his eyes to look at the king's daughter he trembled all over, and was tongue-tied, could not say a word. He had never seen a more beautiful maiden. She was like a peri. She was like an angel, a deer, a gazelle, a piece of the sun to him. He was in a daze.

She smiled. 'Well, do you approve of me?'

'May the king's daughter live long, how can I disapprove what God wrought with such loving care? My father also is a king, and I wait for your orders, king's daughter. To tell the truth, I came here because of you. I think of you day and night.'

'Oh, you do? Well, if you came for me, as you say, and wish to marry me, let me tell you that my father will expect you to pass three tests before he gives his consent.'

'And what are these three tests?'

'First, he will give you a wooden axe and ask you to cut down an iron pole.'

'Cut an iron pole with a wooden axe? How can I?'

'Next, he will ask you to climb to the top of this poplar tree with a cupful of wine on your head, and then climb down without spilling a single drop of wine.'

'Impossible!'

'And here is the third test. He will order his servants to plant three acres of land to millet, and you will have to gather all of this millet, mixed well with the soil, in one day, without missing a single grain. Can you do it?'

'Your father might as well cut off my head right now!'

Apples of Immortality

'Don't get discouraged. Here is St Mary's handkerchief and ring. Take them with you. Be sure to put this handkerchief on the iron pole before you strike, and to drop this ring in the wine cup before you climb the tree. I am sorry I can't help you with the third test. I don't know the answer to that one myself.'

'God is merciful,' said Patikan. 'Let me pass the first two tests and maybe I can pass the third also.'

He went and sat down on the stone bench placed before the palace gate for suitors of the royal maiden. The king saw him and thought, 'That's a fine-looking fellow.' He came out and spoke to him:

'What do you want, my lad?'

'I want to marry your daughter.'

'I have three tests for any suitor who sits on this stone bench. You lose your head if you fail to pass my tests.'

'I know.'

'I am warning you in advance because I don't want to have your blood on my conscience.'

The king made him stand by the iron pole and handed him the wooden axe. 'Can you cut this pole in two?'

Patikan took the axe, put St Mary's handkerchief on the iron pole, said, 'Holy Mother of God!' and struck with all his might. He cut the pole right through the middle, and the upper half fell down.

'Good for you!' said the king. 'Now, I want you to climb to the top of this poplar, and climb down, holding a cup full of wine on your head, without spilling any of the wine. Can you do it?'

'Why not?'

The king made him stand by the poplar tree, filled the cup to the brim and handed it to him. The king did not see him drop St Mary's ring into the cup as Patikan put it on his head and climbed to the top of the poplar; then he climbed down without spilling a drop.

The king and his chamberlain were astonished. No one had ever done this trick. Many other suitors had tried, sons of kings, sons of chamberlains, sons of great merchants, and all had lost their heads.

'I'll have my men plant three acres of land to millet, and I want you to gather all of this millet in one day and not leave a single grain in the field,' said the king. 'Do you want to try?'

'I will try.'

Patikan started picking up the grain in the morning and by noon he was ready to give up. 'I am done for,' he thought. 'They will chop off my

head.' Then he remembered the feather the dove gave him. 'I will burn it and see what happens,' he said to himself.

As soon as he burned the feather, flocks of doves descended upon the field, and more kept coming. The whole field swarmed with these doves and you couldn't drop a pin. In half an hour all the millet was piled up on the edge of the field, and the doves flew away.

'I am saved,' the young prince said. 'The king has to give me his daughter. That was a close call.'

The king sent for him when he heard what he had done. 'He didn't leave a single grain in the field,' the king's men told him, after inspecting the field.

Patikan stood proudly before the king.

'Son, my daughter is lawfully yours,' the king said. 'Stay with us, and my kingdom also will be yours.'

'May the king live long, I have a promise to keep. I have to go.'

The king urged him to stay. He would not. In the end the king gave them his fatherly blessing. 'Go, my children, and enjoy life. Flourish. Prosper. May you turn grey on the same pillow. May your first child be a boy.' He gave his daughter a large dowry, and Patikan received many costly gifts. They loaded their horses and bade the king farewell.

They travelled all day, and pitched their tent beside a lake. Here they ate their supper and went to bed.

She said: 'Patikan, my dearest, you haven't spoken a word of love to me all day.'

He drew his sword and put it down between them.

'What is this sword for? Aren't we man and wife?'

'No. We are brother and sister.'

'Brother and sister! Then whose bride am I?'

'Jan-Polad's. I am taking you to him.'

'You don't mean you are taking me to that bloody Monster? He tried so hard to kidnap me, and now you tricked me into this and expect me to be the wife of that horrible beast? I loathe the sight of him. Ah, what fools we women are! A woman is the slave of her own heart. I can't marry any other man because I love you, and only you, can't you see? I am yours, from head to foot, yours, all of me. But if you have a heart of stone and will not make me your wife then let the fishes and birds feed upon me.'

And she wanted to drown herself in the lake.

'A promise is a promise,' he said. 'I have to keep my word. But don't

Apples of Immortality

worry, after I hand you over to Jan-Polad I will get you out of his clutches somehow, and marry you myself.'

They swore to remain faithful to each other forever, and continued their journey early the next morning. They rode on and on and on, travelling day and night until at last they reached Jan-Polad's castle. The Steel-Monster beamed as he saw them coming.

He thanked Patikan. 'I couldn't have done this in a thousand years,' he said. 'You are now free to go. You are no longer my prisoner and servant.'

But how could Patikan go now, when he had his new sacred promise to keep, and rescue the princess? The Steel-Monster led her to his castle and treated her very well. He was afraid she might recoil from him in disgust, or kill herself. He wooed her. He said: 'Your slightest wish is my command.'

She said: 'You are everything a woman could wish for in a man, but my father and mother made me take a vow that I would remain chaste for seven years when I married. I can marry you on that condition only. Is this agreeable to you?'

'Now that you belong to me I do not care if I wait forty years,' said Jan-Polad.

He asked Patikan to stay with them and be the godfather of their first child, and Patikan said he would be glad to stay.

How to kill the Steel-Monster? They knew that no sword or arrow could pierce his body. And if they ran away, he was sure to capture them.

'Find out from him where his soul is hidden,' Patikan told her. And when the Steel-Monster came back from hunting the next day she looked unhappy and glum.

'Don't you feel well?' he asked. 'Is anything wrong? I want you to always be happy.'

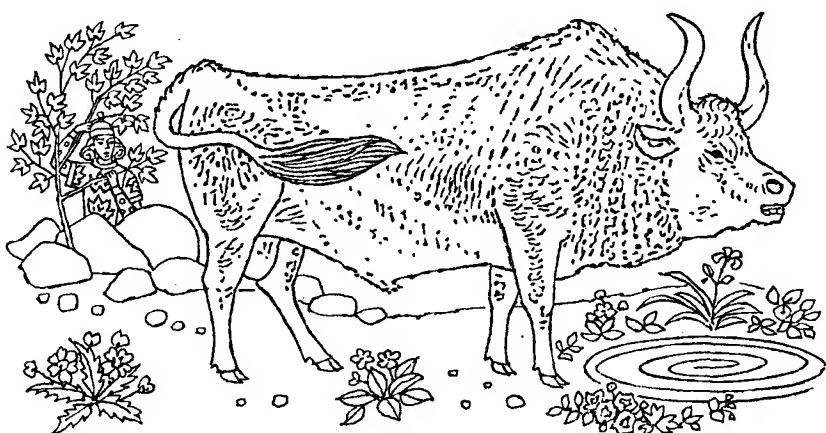
'You are gone all day,' she complained, 'and here I sit alone, doing nothing. I miss you so. If you were to leave your soul behind you I could at least converse with your soul. I have no one to talk with.'

The Steel-Monster was glad to hear these words. He lay down to rest, with his head on her lap. She talked to him in a sweet cooing voice, trying to pry out his secret.

'How could you live alone in this castle? When you are gone, I feel like an owl here. And tell me, please, how could you be such a great hero and win so many fights without a scratch? I know that swords, arrows

and spears mean nothing to you, but you must have a soul like everyone else. Where is your soul? If you won't tell me, then you don't trust me and love me, and I don't care to live if you do not love me.'

'There is a white mountain seven days' journey from here,' said the Steel-Monster, 'and a white bull of enormous strength dwells on it. No man or beast dares go near this bull. Once every seven days the bull feels thirsty and goes to drink from a marble pool on the white mountain. Well, there is a fox in this white bull, and in the fox there is a white box made of mother-of-pearl, and in the box there are seven little birds.'



My soul is hidden away in these seven birds. My whole strength lies in them. No one can slay the white bull. But if the bull were slaughtered, the fox would escape. If the fox were caught, the box would still stay shut and never open. But if the box were opened, the seven little birds in it would fly away. So I am safe.'

She told all this to Patikan. 'I did my share and wheedled his secret out of him, so now you do your share and slay Jan-Polad like a man,' she said.

Patikan received his master's leave to go away for a month. The Monster even gave him his own fiery horse to ride. 'I want to go hunting,' said Patikan.

He went to consult many wise men, who told him :

'Man is vanquished by woman, the beast is vanquished by wine.'

Patikan took seven great skins of seven-year old wine with him as he rode out to the white mountain, where he emptied the marble pool and poured the wine into it. He dug a pit to hide in, and waited for the white bull. The big beast came in seven days, sniffed at the wine, and jumped

to the height of seven poplar trees, then roared with a fierce bellow and ran.

The white bull came back the next day, burning with thirst in the blazing heat. The bull drank the wine, and went crazy, jumping every which way, until he fell down senseless. Patikan sprang out of his hole, plunged his sword deep into the bull's neck, and cut off its head. The Steel-Monster's head jerked and he shuddered while hunting in the woods.

'Woe is me,' the Monster cried, 'they slaughtered the white bull . . . I was fool enough to tell her about my soul . . . I shall die also . . . this is the end for me too . . . but I won't let her belong to another man.'

And he ran home in a mad frenzy to slay the princess.

Patikan cut open the white bull, seized the fox before it could escape, and slit open the fox also. The Steel-Monster ran with blood spurting from his nostrils.

Patikan seized the box from inside the fox's belly and opened it. Blood streamed from the ears and mouth of the Steel-Monster as he staggered toward his castle. The princess ran to the roof, ready to jump if the Monster laid hands on her.

Patikan killed two of the little birds, and the Monster's knees cracked and broke under him.

Patikan killed two more birds, and the Monster's arms broke.

Patikan killed two more, and the Monster's insides poured out of his steel carcass.

Patikan crushed the last remaining bird under a rock. The Monster's head crashed against a rock, as Jan-Polad fell, and black smoke poured out of his ears and nose and mouth. The Monster gasped out his last breath as Patikan raced to the castle on his fiery horse. The princess was wild with joy. She ran down from the roof and flung herself into his arms, crying out: 'I am thine and you are mine!'

God meant them to marry, and they lived happily ever after.

THE RED COW

Once upon a time there lived a poor herdsman and his wife, and they had two children, a boy and a girl, and owned a Red Cow. After his wife died the man took a second wife, but this woman did not like the children and was very cruel to them.

'O my wife, our children need a mother's care, why can't you be good to them?' he said.

'I have plenty to do as it is without bothering with somebody else's children. You take care of your herd and don't worry about these brats.'

The man took his children to the pasture with him. If he left them in the house he knew they would be beaten and tormented by their stepmother. One day the Red Cow spoke to these orphan children in a human voice and said: 'You sit down and rest; I will watch the herd myself.'

The children had nothing but a small loaf of bread to eat all day, and so the Red Cow would come to them at mealtime and let them milk her as she stood before them. And they thrived on her milk. By and by the stepmother had a daughter of her own and the Red Cow said: 'Don't worry, my milk will taste bitter to her child.'

When her daughter became ten years old the woman let her go to the pasture with her stepchildren. The father stayed home, he was too old to tend the herd. The stepmother ruled the household, and took very good care of her own child, who always had plenty to eat and drink.

'I can't understand it, I give you four or five loaves of bread every day and these brats get only one loaf each, and they look healthy and well-fed, and you look sickly and skinny,' said the stepmother.

'Oh mother, when I drink the Red Cow's milk it tastes so bitter it makes me vomit, but they tell me it's sweet like honey.'

'I know what to do with that Red Cow.'

The next morning the wicked woman kept her own daughter home, and said to her husband: 'I had a bad dream last night. I dreamt my

Apples of Immortality

daughter was ill and a saint told me to sacrifice the Red Cow for her health or my daughter, he said, will never get well.'

'O my wife, if we slaughter the Red Cow the children will have to go without milk.'

'I don't care. I want you to butcher the Red Cow.'

The husband was a weak man and gave in to his wicked wife.

'Oh Red Cow, oh mother dear, why do you look so sad today?' the stepchildren asked her in the pasture, seeing her down-in-the-mouth.

'My darling children, I'll be slaughtered, your stepmother wants to sacrifice me for the health of her own daughter.'

'When we go home this evening we'll beg her and our father not to slaughter you.'

['It won't do any good, you will get another beating, and that would make me even sadder than I am. Now listen carefully to what I say: when I am butchered take a pot of my blood and wash your faces in it, but don't let anybody see you do it. And take my head, my bones and feet, with my hooves, to the barn, and hide them in my manger. You might need them some day.']

The children wept aloud, and the Red Cow asked them not to cry.

'Nanny dear, who will feed us after you are butchered? We'll starve! We'll perish!'

'My darling children, you needn't ever worry about going hungry, just run to the barn and drink all the milk you want from my horn. Now come with me, I want you to meet an old woman who will take care of you after I'm gone.'

The Red Cow led them to a well, and an old woman crawled out of it.

'Do you know I'm to be slaughtered?'

'Yes, I heard something about it,' said the old woman.

'Take care of my children.'

'That I will do.'

The Red Cow was butchered the next morning. The stepchildren took a pot of her blood and washed their faces in it. Their hair turned gold. And their faces shone with glowing good looks. They picked up the head, the bones and the feet of the Red Cow and hid them in her manger in the barn. When they ate the meat of the Red Cow, it tasted good; to others, it tasted bitter. They did not have to go hungry because all they had to do was to run to the barn and drink milk from the Red Cow's horn in the manger.

One day in the winter the stepmother dressed her own daughter in

pretty clothes, and the girl put on her silver belt and all her finery, and went to a wedding feast with her mother. The stepchildren had to stay home, their eyes full of tears. The Red Cow called to them from the barn, and the old woman came out of her well and brought them from the manger splendid new clothes to wear, with a pair of gold shoes for the boy, and a pair of silver shoes for his sister. The old woman took them to the wedding feast, and all eyes were upon them as brother and sister danced together and had a merry time. The stepmother sighed to herself: 'Ah, I wish I had such a lovely daughter myself. And I wish that boy's parents would ask for my daughter's hand in marriage. And it would make me so happy to have a son like him. I wonder where they are from. I never saw them before. They must be strangers in this town.'

The old woman took them home, tucked them in bed, hid their clothes and shoes and finery in the manger, and went back to her well before the stepmother came home from the wedding with her own daughter, and woke them up.

'Ah, you wretch, you should have seen her,' she said to the girl.

'Seen whom, mother?'

'The girl at the wedding dancing in silver shoes with a boy dancing in gold shoes. Never saw them before, and nobody seems to know who they are.'

'Oh mother, too bad we missed it. We would have enjoyed watching them.'

The next day the stepmother filled a cauldron with half a measure of millet and told the stepchildren to cry and cry until they covered the grain in the cauldron with their tears. And she went again to the wedding with her own daughter all dressed up as the day before. The old woman came out of her well and brought them from the manger even finer clothes to wear. And she filled the cauldron with salt water, tasting like tears, and took the children to the wedding with her. And again, all eyes were upon them as brother and sister danced together, and had a merry time. They left before the other guests, and as they hurried past the king's pool the girl slipped and dropped her shoe in the pool.

'Oh nanny dear, my shoe fell in the pool!' she cried.

'Never mind, my child. We have no time to lose. Let's go home before your stepmother gets back and tears your new dress to pieces.'

And again, the old woman hid their clothes and shoes in the manger of the Red Cow, put them to bed, and hurried back to her well before the stepmother came home with her daughter, and woke them up.

'Ah, I saw them again at the wedding, in different clothes, and I couldn't

Apples of Immortality

tell whether they are mortals or fiery, seaborne beings from fairyland. I don't know where they fled after the wedding, they left in such haste. And nobody seems to know a thing about them. You should have seen that peri-like maiden, you wretch.'

Early the next morning the horse of the king's son shied away from the pool and would not drink from it, and the king's son came to the pool to see what was wrong and why his men could not water his horse. He caught sight of something sparkling in the water, and he fished it out with a hook. It was her silver shoe. He showed it to the king and said: 'O Father, I shall kill myself if you do not find the owner of this shoe.'

The king's son fell in love with the maiden who wore that shoe, and nothing the king, the queen, and the courtiers said would make him change his mind. The king summoned his heralds and said: 'I want all my female subjects to come to the palace.'

The king's order was proclaimed throughout the city. And the wicked woman said to her stepdaughter: 'The king's palace is no place for you. You can't go there in your rags, half naked, you wretch. I'll go with my own daughter.'

Only the the stepdaughter did not show up at the palace. And every woman, bride or maiden, who tried it on could not wear her shoe, it was either too large or too small, and the king's men searched for the owner. They found the missing maiden in the herdsman's hut and brought her to the palace. She tried it on, and the shoe fitted perfectly, as though she were born with it.

The king's son said: 'She is the only one for me. I'll make her my wife.'

'Where is your other shoe to match this one?' the king's men asked her.

'I don't know. But my granny knows.'

'You go home now,' said the stepmother, and she stayed at the palace, hoping the king's son would change his mind and marry her own daughter.

The head of the Red Cow called again, and the girl went to the barn. 'Send your brother to the king's son! He should say to the king's son: "Come to our house tonight and I shall give my sister away in marriage."'

The old woman came again and brought the girl this time her bridal dress and finery from the manger of the Red Cow. She was beautiful like a fairy maiden when the king's son came to her herdsman's hut that night and made her his wife.

The Red Cow

A week later the stepmother went back to the palace and pleaded with the king to let the royal bride visit the parental home for two days. The king consented. But two days later the wicked woman took her own daughter to the palace, disguised as the bride. The king's son was not fooled, though. He saw that the face, the hands, the feet, the shoes of this false bride were not his wife's. He found his beautiful wife in the herdsman's hut and brought her to the palace, and he told the king everything.

By order of the king the stepmother and her daughter were tied to the tails of two wild mules and dragged across the fields.

The king's son and his wife lived happily ever after. They attained their wish, and may we likewise attain our wishes.

THE PEASANT'S SON AND THE FORTY ROBBERS

Once upon a time there was a peasant, Ohan by name, who had a shiftless godforsaken son. Ohan was afraid that his only child would never amount to anything, and said to his wife: 'Let him be an apprentice, learn a trade and earn his own living. We have kept him long enough.'

This good-for-nothing boy was still under age, but his father wanted to get rid of him and his mother sighed: 'All right, let him go to work.'

Ohan and his son went around looking for work. It's hard to say how far they went until they came to a large house standing alone in wide open country. And the boy liked the looks of the place so much that he said: 'Father, let's stay here tonight.'

They went in, not knowing what they were walking into. Forty robbers were warming themselves around the fire. These outlaws didn't have to hunt for these two innocents. Their prey came to them of its own free will.

'Hey, man, who are you, and what do you want?' asked the chieftain.

'I am just a peasant,' Ohan said, 'and this is my boy. Take him as an apprentice and teach him your trade. He had better start earning his own living.'

The robbers roared with laughter.

'Good!' said the chieftain. 'We'll teach him our trade. But do you know what business we are in?'

'That doesn't matter, as long as he earns an honest living.'

'All right, old man, we'll do what we can for your boy. You can go home tomorrow morning and leave him with us. You will have him back when he masters our trade.'

Ohan went home the next morning, and the boy's first chore as an apprentice was to take a pitcher and go down to the spring to fetch water. While he was at the spring a woman's naked arm—white as snow

—shot out of the water and seized his pitcher. The boy held on to the pitcher as the arm tried to pull him down into the water. Then he heard a woman's scream, and the next thing he knew he was being beaten on the head with a bowl. He struggled with the woman's arm until it disappeared in the water. He took the bowl, which was left lying near the spring, wiped off the mud on it and went back to the house.

The robbers were amazed when he showed them the bowl.

'Where did you find it?' the chieftain asked him.

'Down at the spring that runs by this house,' the boy answered, and told them what happened, his tug-of-war with a woman's arm that beat him with that bowl. 'All I could see was the white arm,' he said.

'This bowl is priceless,' the chieftain said, and kissed the boy on the brow. 'Son, it's lawfully yours. Well, fellows,' he said to his men, 'let's turn it into cash. There is a lifetime of easy living for us in this bowl, and you, my boy, can take your share and go home. Saddle my horse. I am going to town to see what it's worth.'

The chieftain mounted his horse and went straight to a money-changer's. This man took one quick look at the bowl and said. 'It's not for us, too expensive,' and sent him to a certain rich merchant in the bazaar, a sharp trader, who turned it over in his hand, looked at it very carefully, and said: 'Let's go to the king and have him appraise it. I'll pay you whatever the king says it's worth.'

The two men went to the palace and the merchant said to the king: 'At last I caught the thief who broke into my shop last year and took this bowl along with other valuables I owned. I want this bowl back, O King.'

'Tell me, where did you get this bowl?' the king asked.

'May the king live long,' said the chieftain, 'our apprentice, a smart lad, found it at a spring this morning.'

'What kind of business are you in that you need an apprentice? Speak the truth, or I will have your head chopped off.'

'Well, to tell the truth, we are forty robbers by trade. We just hired a young boy as our apprentice, and he found this bowl while drawing water from a spring.'

The king sent his men to seize the other thirty-nine robbers and their apprentice, and bring them all to the hall of justice in the palace. The boy bowed before the king seven times and said: 'May the king live long, I was the one who found this bowl, and gave it to these men. I can bring you eleven more bowls like it if you banish all dishonest merchants from your city. If I fail to keep my promise, chop off my head first.'

Apples of Immortality

'Keep all forty of them in jail and let this boy go find eleven more bowls like this one, if he can,' the king commanded.

The boy tucked the bowl into his bosom, leaped upon the chieftain's horse and galloped away. He rode on and on until he came to the city of another king, and entered the first house he saw. The owner, an old woman, looked very sad as she served his meal.

'Nanny, why do you look so sad?' he said.

'Oh dear, don't ask me. You just eat your food and lie down and rest.'

'Tell me what's troubling you. Maybe I can help you.'

'Ever since we buried the king's only son, and a fine boy he was, somebody has been disturbing his grave. We don't know who takes the corpse out of the grave, but it seems to happen every night, and it bothers us; we all worry about it.'

'Nanny, clear the table, I don't feel like eating. Take me to the king, quick.'

The old woman got up and took him to the king.

'May the king live long,' said the boy, 'allow me to guard your son's grave tonight. You can cut off my head if it's disturbed again.'

'Very well, you may guard it for a change,' said the king.

The boy lay in wait and watched the grave, all eyes and ears. On the stroke of midnight, when even the birds were asleep, he saw three doves fly down, cast off their feathers, and become three pretty maidens.

'Shall we eat first, or shall we wait until the king's son is seated at the table with us?' said one of them.

'Oh, sister, how could you say such a thing? How could you swallow your food when the king's son is still in his grave?'

And the boy saw one of them draw a tablecloth from under her apron and strike it with a red switch she held in her hand. 'Spread the table!' she said, and the tablecloth spread out before them loaded with food and drinks. They ran to the grave, and the maiden holding the red switch struck the gravestone with it and said, 'Open up!' The gravestone fell to one side. Then with another flip of her magic wand the grave itself was opened, and they lifted the king's son out of his coffin and laid him on the ground. At the touch of the magic wand the corpse sneezed and sat up. They removed the shroud, dressed him up in royal clothes, and had him sit at the head of the table with them.

'This is good,' the peasant boy thought. 'I can hit all three with a single arrow without hurting the king's son. They are seated in a row facing him.' He took aim with his bow and let fly an arrow. The three maidens

The Peasant's Son and the Forty Robbers



jumped up from the table, put on their feathers, changed back into doves, and flew away, leaving the tablecloth and the red magic wand behind them. The young watchman came out of his hiding and approached the prince with sword in hand.

‘Good evening, king’s son,’ he said.

‘A thousand greetings to you, my friend.’

‘I am your father’s watchman tonight. Let’s sit down and enjoy this supper.’

After they finished eating he said to the king’s son : ‘And now, you go back into your grave.’

‘But my dear friend, I just got out of my grave. Let’s go home.’

‘No, you must stay in your grave.’

As the peasant boy folded the tablecloth he found a ring and put it on his finger. He picked up the red wand and said :

‘Get back into your coffin !’

The prince went down into his grave. The boy closed the lid of the coffin, and with another flip of his hand set the stone back where it was.

With the first light of dawn the king’s chamberlain came to inspect the grave and found everything in order. He went to congratulate the king. ‘At last the grave is left undisturbed !’ Then the young watchman arrived at the palace and the king said : ‘I am told my son’s grave was not desecrated last night. You did a good job as watchman.’

‘Come and see for yourself.’

The king hastened to his son’s grave with the queen and the chamberlain and saw that everything was as it should be.

Apples of Immortality

'What would you give me if I bring your son back to life?' the boy asked.

'Anything you want,' said the king.

'Well, you go home now. I will have your son out of this grave, don't worry.'

After the king returned to the palace with the queen and the chamberlain the young watchman, using his wand, opened the grave. He gave his hand to the prince and helped him out of the coffin, and the two boys returned to the palace chatting gaily together.

The joyous parents embraced their son. Then, turning to the peasant boy, the king said: 'Now tell me what you want.'

The boy took out his bowl and showed it to the king. 'I need eleven bowls like this. My forty brothers are in jail and I've got to save them.'

'My dear boy, if you want a wife, you can have any girl in my kingdom. You can have a whole city if you like, but I just do not have eleven such bowls to give you.'

'I don't need anything else,' said the boy, and mounting his horse galloped away.

He rode on and on until he reached another city, by the seashore, and again entered the first house he saw.

'I am sorry I can't serve you any meals,' said the owner. 'My own children are hungry. You can't get any food in this town. There is a famine here.'

'You don't have to serve me any meals.'

The boy drew out his tablecloth, struck it with his wand, and a feast was spread out before them.

'Call your children and let them eat all they want.'

The owner and his children had their fill of these tasty foods.

'Why is there a famine here? Don't you have enough land to grow crops?'

'That's it, my friend. We have to have our grain and flour shipped to us from across the sea, but our boats are smashed by some mysterious hand and sent to the bottom of the sea with their cargoes of food. We have been at the mercy of this hand and don't know what to do about it.'

'I know what to do about it. Take me to your king.'

They went to the king.

'What will you give me, O King, if I bring your food ships safely back to harbour and put an end to this famine?'

'I will give you anything you want.'

Ohan's son sailed over the sea and on the return voyage led a fleet of

The Peasant's Son and the Forty Robbers

forty ships loaded with flour and grain, when all at once he saw a woman's white arm with a gold bracelet glistening in the middle of the sea. He grabbed the arm, shook it, shoved it out of his way, and as the arm disappeared in the water he saw that he was holding the gold bracelet in his hand. The famine was over and people had plenty to eat again.

'Name your reward and you shall have it,' said the happy king.

The boy showed him his bowl. 'I need eleven more like this,' he said.

'Why, this bowl alone is worth my entire kingdom! I'll give you my daughter to be your wife, I'll give you a city if you wish, even my kingdom, but where can I find eleven bowls like that?'

'I don't want anything else. My forty brothers are in jail and I can't sleep at night thinking of them. I must find these eleven bowls to get them out of jail.'

'I will see the captain of my fleet and I may have some good news for you by tomorrow morning.'

The king called his captain. 'Do you know where the daughters of the Hour-Peri King take their meals?'

'I know,' said the captain.

'Take him over there, show him the place.'

The king then called the plucky youth and said: 'My captain will take you to the castle where the daughters of the Hour-Peri King eat their meals. I am sure they can give you the bowls you want.'

The boy left his horse with the owner of the house where he was a guest and went aboard the captain's ship. They sailed for seven days and seven nights before they reached the other side. The Captain pointed to a small iron gate near the shore. 'Look, son, that's the door of their castle,' he said.

The boy pushed the door open and went in. He saw an old man busy cooking.

'Good day, daddy.'

'God's day, O mortal, and welcome.'

He was such a nice handsome old man that the boy couldn't take his eyes off him.

'Son, the Hour-Peris will be back any minute now. Hide behind this curtain. It would be a pity if they found you here, I don't want you to get hurt.'

The boy waited behind the curtain, and presently the three daughters of the Hour-Peri King came in.

'Ugh! I can smell a man here,' said one of them.

Apples of Immortality

'Now who would be here beside myself?' said the cook. 'You are smelling me. I am the only mortal here.'

'No, I smell a stranger.'

'I swear there is no one here beside myself. Well, sit down, your meal is ready.'

They set the table and sat down to eat. The chamberlain of the Houriperi King wanted to come in to deliver a letter. 'Wait until we finish our meal,' they said.

The eldest sister poured the wine in her cup and sighed: 'Ah, forty robbers for seven years couldn't taste my water, and then this boy comes along with his pitcher and grabs my arm. I had to hit him with my bowl before he would let go of my arm. I wish he were here with us. I would kiss him and turn him over to you, you would kiss him and give him back to me, and I would kiss him and kiss him again. I drink to his health!'

'Ah,' sighed the second sister, raising her wine cup, 'I shall drink to the health of that wonderful boy who took my magic wand away from me and raised the dead to life. I wish he were here with us. I would kiss him and turn him over to you, you would kiss him and give him back to me, and I would kiss him and kiss him again. Long live that boy!'

'Ah,' sighed the youngest sister, 'I shall drink to the health of that fearless mariner who shoved me out of his way and had forty ships go through when I had the whole city in my power. I wish he were here with us. I would kiss him and turn him over to you, you would kiss him and give him back to me, and I would kiss him and kiss him again. Long live that boy!'

'I wonder if they are talking about the boy hiding behind this curtain!' the cook thought. 'No one else would have the courage to come here.'

'What would you give him if you were to see that boy again?' the cook asked the Houriperis.

'We'll give him anything he asks for, anything!' the three sisters answered as if with one voice.

The boy sprang out from behind the curtain and stood before them. 'Good day, Houriperi maidens,' he said with a bow.

They started up, frightened: then they recognized him and flung their lovely arms around his neck and smothered him with kisses.

'Come, sit down and eat with us!' they said.

The boy sat down and ate with them. At this moment the chamberlain came in again, bowed seven times, handed the letter to the eldest sister, and remained standing with hands folded on his breast.

The Peasant's Son and the Forty Robbers

She opened the letter and read it with tears flowing down her cheeks. The middle sister snatched the letter away from her, and cried as she read it. Then the youngest sister read it and broke into loud sobs.

'What's written in that letter that has upset you so?' the boy asked the Houri-Peris.

'Do you want to know?'

'Yes, tell me.'

The eldest sister went to the chest, took out a picture and set it on the table before him. 'It's our brother. We lost him to Azrael seven years ago and we haven't been able to get him out of his clutches. But you can, can't you?'

'Of course I can. But who will save my forty brothers who are in jail? I need eleven bowls to get them out of jail.' And he told them about the forty robbers.

'Good Lord, why worry about such a trifle? We can give you all the bowls you want,' they said.

'You will be saving my life also if you do. Take me to your father!'

They took him to the Houri-Peri King. The boy bowed seven times and remained standing with hands folded on his breast.

'Why did you bring this mortal here?' the King asked his daughters.

'Because he will free our brother from Azrael,' they said.

'He will! Can you?'

'I can, with God's help.'

'Have you ever seen Azrael?'

'No.'

The King let him pick out the best horse in his stable, and gave him his own sword, his own shield and bow and mace, and asked his chamberlain to go with the boy and show him Azrael's mountain. When the boy leaped upon the horse and rode off with the chamberlain the King said: 'The rascal will do it.'

The chamberlain rode with the boy as far as the foot of Mount Janjavaz, and said: 'I have no right to go any farther, I have to turn back here.'

'Well, good-bye then,' said the boy as he spurred his horse, and raced up the mountain. Azrael's castle was high up on the crags. He reined in before the gate.

'Hey, you, I've come to avenge my kin's blood! Come on out and fight!' he yelled at the top of his voice.

Two black guards ran out of the castle, stared at him with contemptuous eyes, barred his way, and wouldn't let him in. The boy drew his

sword and struck off their heads. Then he jumped down from his horse, picked up the heads and hurled them in through the windows of the castle. The crash aroused Azrael from his sleep. He looked out the window and saw a mounted daredevil screaming bloody revenge.

Azrael took his arms, jumped on his horse and shot out of his castle.

They fought in single combat. Azrael cast his mace, and it shook up the whole earth. The boy picked up the mace and threw it back at him. 'This is no time for jests! Throw it again.'

Azrael cast his seven maces and couldn't hurt the boy. He used his seven bows and missed all his shots. He struck with his seven swords, and cut only the rocks.

'Now it's my turn.'

A single blow was enough to slash off Azrael's head, and the terrible Angel of Death was sprawled at the boy's feet. The monster's head seemed to have some life left in it and the boy was amazed to see it roll away by itself.

He tethered his horse and ran into the castle, and found the son of the Houri-Peri King tightly bound with chains. He freed him, and said: 'Come on, we are going back to your father.'

The two boys rode back together, and as they approached the castle of the King his son said: 'O my friend, when my father asks you to name your reward tell him you want my youngest sister and the ring on his finger.'

The King, the Queen, and their daughters flung their arms around the neck of the young prince and wept for joy. Then the King turned to the peasant boy and said: 'Name your reward and you shall have it.'

'May the king live long, I wish you good health. That would be reward enough for me.'

'No, no, don't be so shy. Your wish will be granted.'

'Well, if you insist, I'd like to take your youngest daughter to wife, I'd like to wear the ring on your finger, and to have eleven bowls like this one.'

'Son, they are all yours, you deserve them, I give them gladly.'

The wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights. Ohan's son took his bride, packed the eleven bowls in his saddlebags, and raced back to his own land. He left his bride with his parents and rushed to the king's palace just when the executioners raised their axes to chop off the heads of the forty robbers. The boy bowed before the king and opened his saddlebags.

'May the king live long, here are the bowls, eleven of them.'

The Peasant's Son and the Forty Robbers

He took them out one by one and stacked them up before the king.

'Call the merchant,' the king commanded.

The merchant came in and bowed.

'Can you recognize the bowl that belongs to you?' the king asked him.

The merchant grew dizzy as he stared at the eleven bowls with his greedy eyes and didn't know which one to choose, they were all priceless, and each more beautiful than the others.

The forty robbers were released and the executioners chopped off the head of the lying merchant instead. And all the dishonest merchants in the city were banished by the king's order, and the king gave his crown to a peasant's son as all his subjects shouted their approval.

ZULVISIA

Every Armenian father on his deathbed warned his sons against this mountain that lured hunters to their doom. All hunters dreaded it, though drawn irresistibly to it, and it was talked about in the king's court and discussed among princes fond of hunting. The evil fame of this mountain spread to other kingdoms, and hunters everywhere shuddered when it was mentioned in their conversation, yet no one could give an eyewitness account of this dreadful peak. Those who went to hunt on this mountain never came back. And mighty princes disappeared with their warriors and were never heard of again. The secret of this mountain was never revealed, and remained a dark mystery.

And now, just before the old king died, he told his seven sons for the last time to stay away from this mountain. His eldest son, succeeding him on the throne, laughed off his father's warning, called his friends together, and went to hunt on the forbidden mountain, as if there were nothing to worry about. Well, they went, but they never came back. The second son became king, and went to see what happened to his brother. He was never seen again. Six brothers perished, one by one, and at last it was the turn of the youngest son to be king. And mounting his horse, he rode off to avenge their deaths.

He rode through the same treacherous country. A deer crossed his path, and he gave chase, followed by his men. The deer disappeared in the woods on the northern slope of the mountain. The young king was astonished by the beauty of the forest scene. High above the rocky desolate plain, where nothing grew, there was this enchanted place, all wonderfully green, thrumming with birds and loud with their song. The young king admired the shady bowers, the waterfalls and pools. Here and there, at a most inviting spot, a tent was pitched. Each tent was of a different colour and furnished for the comfort and enjoyment of men in this hunters' paradise. This was heaven, the king thought. The tables

in the tents were loaded with choice meats and drinks, but there wasn't a soul in the whole place.

While the king was strolling along by himself admiring the view, his men fell on the food. When the king returned to the tents he found his men dead or dying. They screamed and moaned in pain, but he could do nothing to help them, and all died of a deadly poison.

'So this is what happened to my brothers,' he said to himself. 'But whoever set this trap must be coming back. I will wait and see.'

As night fell upon the mountain the young king was hiding in an oak tree, and kept a sharp lookout. The forest was still, and nothing broke the awful silence of the night until with the first faint gleam of the morning he heard the thunder of galloping hoofs and saw a gallant rider flying between heaven and earth storm into the forest on a fiery charger. This young knight came to inspect the camp. He counted the dead bodies lying around the tents, and summoned his servants, who dragged them off by their feet and threw them one by one into a deep rocky gorge, then gathered the horses of the dead men, and scurried about, carrying out their master's orders. The servants loaded the belongings of the dead men on the horses captured and set free the deer that was used as a decoy, and covered the tables with fresh food and drinks for the next hunting party.

Their master walked through the forest and was startled to see a horse tied to an oak tree.

'There was a horse for every dead man. Whose horse is this?' he said.

'It's my horse,' an angry voice answered him from the oak tree. 'No true warrior would do what you have done, luring unsuspecting hunters into this trap and poisoning them. Get out of my sight! Clear out of here as fast as you can, and I will take your measure not here, but before your own house, you devil!'

The young knight looked around to see where this voice came from, and for a moment was speechless with rage. Then he saw a man hiding in the oak tree, but refrained from calling him names, and said in a gallant voice:

'I forgive you, O mortal, for speaking to me in that tone, but if you are as bold as you sound why don't you mount your horse and follow me? If you wish to fight me I gladly accept your challenge. I am Zulvisia.'

And jumping on his fiery steed this handsome warrior galloped off. The young king watched him disappear from his view like a luminous figure of fire, with hair of flaming gold flying from under the helmet and brushing the shoulders. Could this Zulvisia be ... a woman, by any

Apples of Immortality

chance? And if so, who was she? A beautiful young queen, or a woman robber?

Zulvisia, truly, was a woman, and for a while the young king hesitated to follow her. He rode in the same direction, hoping to see her again. There was no sign of her or of her steed anywhere. It's hard to say how far he rode until he came to three castles. In each of these castles lived



an old mother-dev with her forty sons. They were three sisters, and received him kindly. Their sons would have torn him to shreds like so many monsters.

‘Where to?’ the mother-devs asked him.

‘I am trying to find Zulvisia,’ he said. ‘She poisoned, killed and robbed my six brothers, and many others who fell into her trap, and I mean to avenge their deaths.’

‘Too bad we didn’t know, or we could have seized Zulvisia and held her for you. She passed by here twice today.’

They were bragging, of course. The mere mention of Zulvisia’s name made even the devs shiver. They asked him to stay with them and be their big brother, but he could not stay. He drew a pair of scissors, a razor and a mirror from his pocket and gave one to each mother-dev.

‘When you see drops of blood on these scissors and this razor and see the mirror clouded over you will know I am in danger, and need your help.’

They showed him the way to Zulvisia’s castle and he bid them farewell, as he rode off to find her.

The young king was wonderstruck when he beheld her castle glowing like the sun in the pitch-black night. He rode around the crystal walls

looking for an entrance, but this great gorgeous building had no gate. He was wondering what to do next when he heard the loud snoring of somebody close by, and peering down, saw an old man sleeping at the bottom of a deep trench under the castle wall, with a lantern by his side. He went down into the trench, and the old man woke up with a start.

'Who are you, O mortal? And how dare you come here when no snake on its belly dares crawl into this place, no bird on the wing dares fly over it? What do you want?'

'I came to see Zulvisia.'

'Hmmm, Zulvisia! Thousands of men have lost their lives for Zulvisia, and I am another victim. I am the son of the King of Chin-ma-Chin and the only man she has spared so far. I'd rather not tell you how many years I have been Zulvisia's captive here. She won't let me go home.'

The young king told him what happened to his six brothers. 'Tell me, my good man, what shall I do now? I can't go in. I see no gate,' he added.

'Well, you might do this: every morning, when the sun blossoms out over these heights, Zulvisia goes up to the tower of her crystal castle wearing a blouse of priceless pearls, and scans her land and frontiers. If she sees a trespasser, man or beast, she lets out such a cry that anybody who hears her voice drops dead from fright. But if you plant a forked stick in front of this castle and hang your coat and your cap on it and then hide in a pit where she can't see you, you might be safe. Let her call twice. When she cries out in her blood-curdling voice for the third time you come out of your hiding and look her straight in the face. She will spare you when you do that.'

The young king did what the old man told him, and the next morning, at sunrise, he sprang out of the pit where he was hiding, stood boldly under the castle wall and looked her straight in the eye. And Zulvisia recognized him.

'I am vanquished,' she sighed. 'You are brave enough to make me your wife. No man who ever heard my voice and looked me in the face lived to tell about it. You did it. My secret is out. You broke my spell.'

Zulvisia let down her long golden hair, and its lustrous sheen and fragrance nearly drove him out of his mind. And while he was kissing her hair she pulled him up to the tower as with a rope.

Zulvisia had forty maids-of-honour, who rode with her wherever she went. They came and stood before him with hands folded on their breasts.

'Meet your new master,' said Zulvisia. 'I expect you to serve my husband as faithfully as you have served me. He heard my voice, and as you can see he is still alive and in full possession of his wits. This man broke

Apples of Immortality

my spell. From this day on I am his wife, and everything I own, all my lands and possessions, belong to him, as I do, myself.'

Her forty maids-of-honour bathed their new master, clothed him in splendid new garments, and kissed his hand. His first act as Zulvisia's husband was to set the old man free and send him back to Chin-ma-Chin.

Bride and groom were so enamoured of each other that there was neither day nor night for them in their crystal castle. His hate for Zulvisia turned to love, and the young king was a most happy husband. But they could not live forever on love alone.

'O my beloved, O my bold one, from this day on you will have to do all the hunting here and manage our lands and possessions. Bring him my fiery horse,' she ordered her maids.

They led her steed out of the stable and brought it to the young king. 'Be sure to obey your new master and serve him well,' she said, kissing the horse on the eyes, and handing the bridle to her husband. The horse looked at his new master with flashing eyes, and let him put his arms around his neck and pat him on the back. The horse kept looking at the young king and smelling him as though to remember what his master looked and smelled like, and soon they became friends.

The young king saddled this fiery steed and was ready to go hunting, but he couldn't bear the thought of being away from his wife even for a single hour. He sprang off the horse and ran back into the castle.

'What is it, my sweet? Why do you look so upset?'

'How can I ever leave you, Zulvisia? Your beauty, your fragrance—I just can't tear myself away from you.'

She cut off a lock of her golden hair, put it in a jewelled locket and gave it to her husband.

'Take this locket with you,' she said.

He tucked the locket into the breast pocket of his coat, and the young king mounted and rode off.

He found nothing to shoot for some time. Then he saw a stag and gave chase. The stag jumped into the river, and he plunged in and shot it. He was so excited he did not see the locket falling into the river as he struggled with the beast.

The locket was washed away, and was picked up by a man in a distant kingdom while watering his fields. He took it to his king, and received a big reward for it.

The king had never seen a locket like this one. And whose hair was it? No one seemed to know. He summoned all the great and wise men of his kingdom to council.

Zulvisia

'Whose hair is this? Answer me, or I'll cut off your heads.' He gave them three days to come up with the right answer.

The king's courtiers, all the wise men and magicians in this kingdom could not tell him whose hair it was, and the king was already in love with the woman who had such golden hair. An old hag in rags came to the palace and said to the chamberlain: 'I know whose hair it is. What will you give me if I tell you?'

'A handful of gold coins.'

'Make it two handfuls. One for saving your lives, and another for my cunning.' The old woman pocketed two handfuls of gold and said: 'This locket belongs to Zulvisia.' And she told the king's men all she knew about Zulvisia, and they repeated it to the king.

The king gave strict orders to have Zulvisia brought before him. To save their necks his councillors went back to the old hag and promised her weight in gold if she would bring Zulvisia to the king's palace. The old witch took a few deadly snakes and tucked them into her bosom. She turned one snake into a walking stick, another snake into a whip, got into a small raft for two and pushed it up the river. When she reached Zulvisia's pleasure-garden she hid the raft in the rushes on the bank of the river, and sat down by the road.

Zulvisia's husband happened to be hunting along the same river and was on his way home when he saw an old woman crying by the wayside. He stopped and asked her who she was and why she was crying.

'O my son, may God bless your sweet soul for speaking such kind words to a poor old woman like me. I am a pilgrim, on my way to Jerusalem, and I missed the caravan I was to go with. I lost my way and I have been stranded here with nowhere to go and nothing to eat. Take me to your house for the love of God, and let me sleep beside your dog until I can join my friends.'

He took pity on the old woman and wanted to lift her onto his horse, but the horse sensed what she was up to, reared high on its hind legs and threw her off.

'Son, never mind. You go ahead, and I will shuffle along as best I can.'

When the old woman arrived at the castle Zulvisia took one look at her and said: 'I don't like her. She is up to some mischief. We'll feed her and let her go.'

Her husband thought she was a harmless old pilgrim, and prevailed upon Zulvisia to let her stay with the maids, not knowing the old hag had a thousand tricks up her sleeve. The crafty old woman entertained the maids with amusing tales, and they urged their mistress to see her

Apples of Immortality

once, just for fun. 'Very well, let her come to my chamber,' said Zulvisia. And one visit followed another. Soon the old woman was with Zulvisia every day, heaping praises upon the beautiful mistress of the castle.

'Ah, your husband is a wonderful man! What a blessing such a man is! May God be good to you both. He learned your secret, broke your spell, earned your love and devotion. But what is his secret, do you know?'

'No, I do not,' said Zulvisia.

'How can you live as man and wife and not know each other's secrets? If your husband really loves you he ought to tell you his secret.'

The old woman had her so worried about her husband's love that Zulvisia coaxed him to tell her the secret of his strength and courage, what made him so bold and invincible. And the young king confided to her that his secret lay in his Lightning-Sword and said he would be lost without his sword. He made her swear upon the rings they had exchanged as man and wife she would never reveal his secret to anyone. But to prove to the old hag that her husband did love her with all his heart Zulvisia told her about his magic sword.

'My husband never goes out without his sword,' she said, 'and at night he keeps it under his pillow.'

This was what the old hag wanted to know. A few days later Zulvisia and her husband enjoyed a feast in the castle and drank of the wine the old woman mixed with a sleeping potion. Drowsy from the wine she kept pouring in their cups they went to bed. By midnight the wily old woman made sure both were fast asleep in their separate chambers. She crept into the young king's bedchamber, snatched the Lightning-Sword from under his pillow, ran up to the tower of the castle, threw the sword into the river, then went back to bed.

The young king did not wake up the next morning. The maids listened through the keyhole and heard him gasping for breath. They told their mistress, and Zulvisia ran into her husband's chamber and found him half dead, foaming at the mouth, his eyes sunken, unable to speak. Hearing the cries and wails in the castle, the old hag got out of bed and set up an awful howl herself, beating her head, her breast, and her knees with both hands. Then she slipped out of the building, got her raft ready, and hurried back entwined with live snakes. All drew back in horror. She ordered Zulvisia to follow her to the river.

'Come along with me, or I'll have these snakes tear out your eyes, feed

on your cheeks, coil around your neck and devour you with their bloody fangs.'

Zulvisia was speechless with fear. Her maids scattered and fled, as the old hag pushed their mistress out of the castle and dragged her to the raft hidden in the rushes on the river bank. And soon they were floating down the river together. She sold Zulvisia to the king's chamberlain for a sack of gold, and the chamberlain took his prize catch to the king.

Let us now return to Zulvisia's husband. The mother-devs who befriended him saw drops of blood on the scissors and the razor he gave them, and the mirror turned misty. 'Our big brother is in danger,' they said, and rushed to the crystal castle with their sons. They learned from the terrified maids what happened, and searched for the Lightning-Sword but could not find it. A few of the devs plunged into the river to catch some fish for their supper, and hauled out a huge fish. It jumped and twisted, and when they slit it open out came the magic sword it had swallowed. They ran to the dying king and put it back under his pillow. He sat up at once, opened his eyes, and stared at them.

'Where is Zulvisia?' he asked.

They told him what happened. He ran to get his fiery steed, and it was a pitiful sight to see that splendid horse lying on the floor of the stable too weak to move, hungry, thirsty, covered with dust and grime. He threw his arms around the horse's neck and kissed him on the eyes. The horse smelled the young king, sneezed, and sprang to his feet.

'O my faithful steed, you are wiser than I am. I was deceived by that old witch, but you suspected who she was and threw her off your back, you would not let her ride home with me, and now see what happened. Come on, we are going to find my Zulvisia, we must save her before it's too late.'

The horse understood everything, and whinnying and pawing the ground, seemed to say to his master he was ready, they must go save Zulvisia.

The young king divided the treasure hoard in the castle among the forty maids and set them free, and he gave the castle itself to the mother-devs and their sons. For himself, he took a saddlebag packed with gold coins and galloped off to find his wife. Following the course of the river, he rode on and on until he came to the distant city where Zulvisia was held captive in the palace, and reined in before a small tumbledown house on the outskirts of the city. An elderly woman opened the door.

'Mamik, could you put me up for one night?'

Apples of Immortality

'Son, I can't take in any guests, I have no extra room. Go to another house.'

He drew a handful of gold coins from his saddlebag. 'Could you use some of this gold?'

'Come in, son, come in! I'll make room for your horse too. A traveller is God's guest.'

While eating his supper he asked her many questions and the woman told him what she knew about Zulvisia. 'Son, the whole town has been bustling for the past thirty-five days getting ready for the king's wedding, and in another five days Zulvisia will become the king's wife. But I've heard it said Zulvisia won't have him as a husband, she insists she is already married, and if they force her to marry our king she will kill herself. She keeps a cup of poison in her room, and cries all day, remembering her husband.'

'Mamik, that's enough, you don't have to tell me anything more about Zulvisia.' It was too painful for him to hear these details about his captive wife. 'Here is another handful of gold for you. Go to the bazaar and buy yourself a dress such as ladies wear at court. Then go to the king's palace and try to see Zulvisia if you can. Wear this ring when you see her. Just show her my ring and then come back and tell me what she says.' He took the ring off his finger and gave it to her.

The next day the woman turned up at the palace dressed like a chamberlain's wife, with a priceless ring sparkling on her finger. The palace guards and the ladies-in-waiting let her in, and she was admitted into the women's quarters. They told Zulvisia a chamberlain's wife wanted to see her.

'I don't want to see anybody,' she cried. 'Send her away!'

The woman opened Zulvisia's door without knocking, and walked in. She made sure Zulvisia would see the ring on her finger, and as soon as Zulvisia saw her husband's ring she became meek like the Lord's lamb.

'Oh, I am so glad to see you, welcome, a thousand times welcome!'

The woman closed the door behind her.

'Mamik, who gave you that ring, where is he?'

'The owner of this ring is a guest in my house, waiting for your orders.'

'Tell him to wait three more days. Go to the king and assure him I have changed my mind, I will marry him now. Tell your guest I'll be in the king's pleasure-garden on the morning of my wedding day, which will be three days from today.'

'I brought the girl to her senses,' the woman said to the king before

Zulvisia

leaving the palace. 'Zulvisia will marry you, don't worry. Let her enjoy herself in your pleasure-garden on the morning of your wedding day.'

The king was overjoyed to hear this, and the woman left the palace, pocketing her reward. She went home and told her guest what happened and gave him Zulvisia's message.

The great day arrived. The wedding procession started out from the king's pleasure-garden, led by forty mounted warriors and forty musicians, with forty maids-of-honour walking on both sides of the procession, and forty bridesmaids walking from behind. The streets were crowded with the king's subjects eager to catch a glimpse of the bride, who was said to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Then, all of a sudden, lightning flashed out of the sky and the wedding procession scattered as though struck by a thunderbolt. And before anybody knew what happened Zulvisia was carried off by a man on a fiery horse.

The king sprang onto his own fiery horse and galloped after the abductor. Thousands of his warriors joined the chase. The Lightning-Sword mowed them down. The king fell off his horse and died. Those who survived the slaughter turned against him, and sided with the abductor.

'Come back and be our king! We still want Zulvisia to be our queen,' they pleaded with this matchless warrior.

They brought the couple back to the palace, with many honours, and made the young king sit on the vacant throne.

Three apples fell from heaven, one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

II

TALE OF THE LAUGHING FISH

Once upon a time a fisherman caught a fish that was so pretty and unlike any fish he ever saw that he put it in a clay bowl and took it to the king in Baghdad, hoping to receive a reward for it. The king looked at the fish with amazement and delight and had it placed in a fine silver bowl. The fisherman received his reward and departed. The king showed this fish to all his courtiers and said to his vizier: 'Take it to my wife. She likes fish.'

When the vizier took the silver bowl to the queen's quarters she asked suspiciously: 'Is this a male or female fish?'

The fish leapt out of the bowl and shook with loud laughter. It did a few flip-flops and jumped back into the water. The queen and the vizier were astonished, and she cried: 'Take it away. I can't keep it in my room, it may be a male fish for all I know, and I couldn't even think of eating a male fish.'

The vizier told the king what happened, and the king was incredulous. He wondered 'What did the fish mean by laughing?' It worried him no end, and he felt offended too. A laughing fish was an unheard of thing.

Some time later the queen took to bed and the court hakims could not cure her. The king sent for Lokhman, who lived in Aleppo and was the greatest hakim in the world. As the vizier prepared for his journey to Aleppo, the queen told him: 'Find out on your way if people are talking about me, where my name is mentioned, and where it's not.'

The vizier mounted his horse and set out for Aleppo accompanied by two palace guards. On his way he made inquiries to see if people talked about the queen, and stopped at a village to rest for a while before continuing his journey. An old ploughman was tilling his field and his seven-year-old son said: 'Father, do you see these three horsemen? They are coming to ask you some questions. One is the king's vizier. You can answer them any way you like, but don't get angry with me if I talk out of turn, and speak the truth.'

Tale of the Laughing Fish



'Why should the king's vizier want to talk to a poor ploughman like me? I told you a thousand times not to talk nonsense. You do say the craziest things.'

The horseman rode up to them and the vizier said: 'Greetings, pappy. How's your health? How have you been? And what's the news around here?'

He got the ploughman talking about himself and other villagers to find out what they knew or said about the queen. 'I want to know how our people are getting along and I like to listen to their complaints,' said the vizier.

The boy gathered enough courage to break in at this moment and say: 'May the king's vizier live long, you are wasting your time. No matter where you go you will hear the queen's name mentioned. People do talk about her. You might as well save yourself all this trouble.'

The vizier was taken aback. How did this little fellow know what the queen told him? He mounted his horse.

'Where to?' the boy asked.

'The queen has been ill for some months and we are going to Aleppo to fetch Lokhman. Maybe he can cure her,' said the king's vizier.

'Lokhman isn't in Aleppo, he is in Damascus,' the boy said.

'We were told he is in Aleppo.'

'Not now. He went to Damascus.'

'How do you know?'

'Never mind how I happen to know it. You listen to me and save yourself the trouble of going all the way to Aleppo when he is in Damascus.'

And sure enough, they found Lokhman to be in Damascus.

Apples of Immortality

'Who told you I wasn't in Aleppo?' the famous hakim asked the king's vizier on their way to Baghdad.

'A ploughman's son, a seven-year-old boy we met on our way,' replied the vizier. 'Somehow that little boy knew it.'

This worried Lokhman. 'If he knows so much about me at seven, what will become of me when he grows up?' he thought to himself. 'I shall lose my practice, that's sure. This boy can ruin my reputation.'

When Lokhman reached Baghdad and examined the queen, he prescribed for her the heart and blood of a healthy peasant boy, and the boy of his choice—and the queen's—was the ploughman's son. But the vizier had taken a fancy to the lad and fooled them both. The blood the queen drank and found so refreshing was that of a slaughtered lamb. The queen was just pretending to be sick, and she got well after this treatment. Lokhman received a large reward from the king and left with the assurance he was rid of the ploughman's son.

The king kept brooding over the loud laughter of the fish and questioned all the wise men in his kingdom in his desire to get to the bottom of it, but no one could give him a reason that made sense.

'May the king live long,' said the vizier, 'I know a small village lad who seems to know everything. The boy is a mind reader. Let's ask him.'

The king gave the vizier a bag of gold and told him to bring that boy immediately to Baghdad. The chamberlain rode back to the ploughman's village, glad he had saved the boy's life, and hoping the little fellow could solve this riddle that baffled everybody in the palace.

'Greetings, pappy,' he said to the ploughman.

'Greetings, and a thousand blessings to you, king's vizier.'

'I came to take your boy to the king.'

The ploughman was thunderstruck. 'Why should you take him to the king? We are poor people, and he is just a little boy. Why should the king be interested in a little boy?'

'He is a very wise little boy, that's why. Here is a bag of gold for you as a present from the king.'

The old ploughman feared kings and courts and thought his son might not come back if he let him go. But the lad knew what he was wanted for and urged his father to take the money. 'God is merciful,' he said. 'I will come back safe and sound, don't worry.'

The ploughman brightened at these words of his son, thanked the vizier for the king's present, and let his son go with him. The vizier lifted the boy onto his horse and rode back to Baghdad.

He presented his charge to the king in fine new clothes. The boy

Tale of the Laughing Fish

bowed seven times, on the eighth kissed the hem of the king's robe, and stood before him with folded hands. He listened carefully to what the king told him, and said:

'May the king live long, I know why the fish laughed, but I cannot tell you.'

'Tell me!'

'May the king live long, you will be sorry if I do.'

'Take him to jail,' the king said to the vizier, just to frighten the little fellow.

That night the boy stayed in jail. The next morning the king, the vizier, and all the courtiers tried hard to make him talk, but all he would say was, 'I know why the fish laughed, but I cannot tell.' The king lost his patience and ordered his executioners to chop off the boy's head.

'Allow me, O king, to tell you a story before you chop off my head,' the boy said, 'and if you still want to kill me, you can, my life is in your hands.'

'Go ahead, I am listening,' said the king.

'May the king live long,' said the boy, 'once upon a time a king was hunting in the desert and asked for water, but no water was to be had. His men scurried around looking for a spring and at last found some water in a hole. They filled a cup and gave it to the king. As he raised the cup to his parched lips his little dog jumped on him from a rock and knocked the cup out of his hand, and it broke into a thousand pieces. This annoyed the king so much that he drew his sword and slashed the dog in two.'

'There were some wise men with the king, who said: "Why did you kill this poor dog? Maybe it wanted to warn you of something. Let's have one of our horses drink this water before you drink it yourself. It may be poisoned."

'A horse drank from the hole, swelled up and died on the spot. The king was sorry. "Ah, I killed my dog for nothing," he sighed.

'Before you kill me, O king, be sure you too will not regret it and say, "I killed a poor ploughman's son for nothing."'

The king relented, but kept the boy in jail. The next morning the boy kept repeating: 'I know why the fish laughed, but I cannot tell it, you will be sorry if I do.'

When the boy saw the executioners coming back, he said: 'May the king live long, allow me to tell you about another dog before they chop off my head.'

The king was willing to listen.

Apples of Immortality

'One day a king dined in the house of his vizier, and after dinner they amused themselves with a playful monkey. The king called the queen to come watch the monkey's tricks, and she left her baby in the cradle and joined the king and his courtiers in the banquet hall. The king's dog stayed with the baby, as was its habit. A huge deadly snake crawled out of a crack in the wall and coiled around the cradle, but before it could strangle the baby, the dog sprang on the monstrous snake and tore it to bits after a savage struggle.

'Servants saw the dog licking its bloody paws and thought it had killed and eaten the baby. During the ensuing clamour and commotion the dog, spattered all over with the serpent's blood, was slain by his master. The king ran into the room and found the baby unharmed. The cradle was tipped over to one side, and the child lay sleeping peacefully in it. The king was very sorry, and sighed, "Ah, I killed my faithful dog for nothing."

'And now, O king, watch out that you do not say, "I killed a poor ploughman's son for nothing."'

The boy spent another night in jail. The next morning the king ordered that the ploughman's son be brought before him. The boy's answer was the same to all the threats and promises of the king. 'I know why the fish laughed, but I cannot tell you, you will be sorry if I do.' He was a stubborn lad and would not budge. The king was so exasperated by now that the boy sensed this was his last chance. He had to tell another story to save his life. He threw himself at the king's feet and begged him not to turn him over to the executioners until he heard this story also.

'A king who had no children was very fond of his parrot. He liked to take his parrot on his knee and talk to it, play with it. One day the parrot was very sad and downcast, and the king said: "What's the matter? Don't you feel well? Or don't you get enough to eat?"

' "May the king live long," said the parrot in a human voice, "I didn't come out of a hole in the wall, you know. I have a father, a mother, my own kith and kin to think of, and I miss them. But you never let me go home."

' "May God bless your sweet father's soul, why didn't you tell me before? You can fly home any time you like, and be sure to give my regards to your parents, but come back, I will miss you very much if you don't."

'The king opened his window and let the parrot fly home. After two weeks of loving and cooing the parrot was ready to come back, and said to its parents: "The king is waiting for me, and I want to take him a

Tale of the Laughing Fish

present when I go back." "Give him these two apple seeds," the parents said, and wrapped them up in a piece of paper. The parrot flew back with this paper in its beak and dropped it on the king's knee. The king opened the paper, showed the seeds to his courtiers, and gave them to his gardener to plant them in a secluded spot in his pleasure garden. "Let's see what will come out of these seeds," he said.

In two or three years two apple-trees, the like of which the king had never seen before, grew out of these seeds, and each bore a single apple. One day as one of these apples grew ripe it fell to the ground, and the gardener picked it up and took it to the king, expecting a reward. The king was delighted with the apple. He admired its size, colour and fragrance, and showed it to his courtiers.

"Let's see what it tastes like," the king said. He took out his diamond-handled pocket knife and peeled the apple. Just as he was putting a slice of it in his mouth the parrot brushed up against him and with a mighty sweep of its wing knocked the apple out of his hand. This made the king so angry that he seized the parrot and tore it in two. "You brought the seeds yourself but you won't let me eat this apple," he said.

The king's courtiers were shocked. "May the king live long, perhaps your parrot had a reason for doing what it did. Let's feed a slice of this apple to a lamb and see what happens," they said.

One slice was enough to kill the lamb. The king was sorry, but he couldn't bring his parrot back to life. He thought his gardener tried to poison him, and the man went home with bowed head, knowing his hours were numbered.

"The king will chop off our heads tomorrow," he said to his wife. "These are poisonous apples."

"Then we had better eat the other apple before the executioners get here," said his wife.

The gardener plucked the apple from the other tree, sliced it in two, ate one half and gave the other half to his wife. And lo and behold, instead of dying they recovered the bloom of their early youth so that they could hardly recognize each other.

When the executioners knocked on their door the next morning and walked in with their swords, what did they see? The gardener and his wife had become a couple of fifteen-year-olds . . . The king questioned them and learned they ate the other apple and didn't die.

"May the king live long," said the gardener, "both were apples of immortality, but the one I brought you had fallen to the ground and I suppose was poisoned by a snake. I didn't pluck it from the tree. That's

Apples of Immortality

why the lamb died. But look at us . . ." The king pardoned them, and was glad to have the two apple trees of immortality in his garden.

'I have finished my tale, O king, and now you can do with me what you like, but before you order my execution be sure you won't regret it later and say: "Why did I kill the ploughman's son when he meant well and wished me no harm?"'

The king softened and spoke to the boy in a friendly voice. 'Now tell me, son, why the fish laughed, so that I can have some peace of mind, and I will pardon you and give you anything you want.'

'Do you really want me to tell you? You will be sorry if I do,' the boy said again.

'Yes, you must tell me why the fish laughed. I cannot rest until I know the reason.'

'Very well then, I will tell you. But you must let me be king for three hours.'

The king stepped down from the throne and had the little boy sit in his place. 'You are king for three hours.' The boy ordered the vizier and all the courtiers to gather before him. They did. Then he ordered the queen to appear before him with her forty maids-of-honour, and they too came and stood before him. The king stood beside the throne.

'Do you remember the fish I sent you in a silver bowl?' the king asked his wife.

'Yes, I remember. I didn't want to keep it in my room, thinking it might be a male fish. As for eating it, without knowing its sex, heaven forbid! You know how I feel about such things.'

The boy-king ordered that one of the queen's maids-of-honour take off her clothes. He pointed her out and said, 'The one in the green dress, standing next to the queen.'

'Why, this is preposterous!' the queen protested. 'Whoever heard of a maid-of-honour, and one so young and attractive, and so very modest, undressing before men? What kind of nonsense is this? She is the daughter of the King of the East. And the son of the King of the West, the son of the King of the South, the son of the King of the North, all want to marry her. She gets ten proposals a day, and now you expect her to stand naked before men? For shame! She will do nothing of the sort.'

'Then I will not tell you why the fish laughed,' said the boy, speaking from the king's throne.

'Take off her clothes!' the king commanded in an angry voice. 'This boy is king for three hours and I expect all of you to obey him instantly.'

The vizier dragged the maid-of-honour to the centre of the throne-

Tale of the Laughing Fish

room and stripped her of her clothing, and oh, no daughter of Eve was she, but a virile son of Adam.

'Take off your clothes, all of you!' the king roared. And as all the maids-of-honour undressed they turned out to be boys, all forty of them. The king and the vizier stared at them and at the queen and at each other with unbelieving eyes, and the blood froze in their veins.

'May the king live long,' said the little boy seated on the throne, 'now you see it with your own eyes, now you know why the fish laughed and I could not tell you.'

'Executioners!' called the king.

The executioners came in and bowed.

'Chop off the heads of all these men! And the queen's too.'

Forty-one heads flew off under their heavy swords.

The king kissed the wise little boy on the forehead and made him his heir and successor. The boy sent for his father and mother, and they came to Baghdad to live with him. And after the king passed away the ploughman's son ruled as king.

Three apples fell from heaven; one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and for him who heeds the teller's words.

THE WOODCUTTER

Once upon a time there was a Woodcutter, and no matter how hard this Woodcutter worked he remained miserably poor. He had no children, no relatives—nobody except his wife.

Every God's day the Woodcutter was up by daybreak, seized his rope and axe and went off to the woods to gather brushwood. He was so good at it that by nightfall he did not leave a single twig lying on the ground



for the birds to build their nests with, not a stick for a traveller to kindle a fire and keep himself warm on a cold blustery night.

One day as usual he rose at dawn, swung his axe and rope over his shoulder, and went off to the woods for his daily load of brushwood, when a big Snake suddenly crossed his path.

'Good morning, brother Snake!' said the Woodcutter.

'My goodness, man, what is this?' said the Snake. 'All the wild birds and beasts in the woods have been complaining about you. You don't leave them a stick. You pick up everything and go.'

The Woodcutter

'What can I do, brother Snake? I am a poor man, and this is how I make my living, selling wood in the bazaar. I have a wife to take care of.'

'Since you are so poor, will you heed my advice?'

'Of course I will, brother Snake.'

'Chop off my head and tail, take the rest of me home with you, bury it in your backyard, and build a chapel over my grave. In a few months a pomegranate tree will grow in the chapel and bear great big pomegranates. When you pick one of these pomegranates and break it in two you will see it packed with diamonds and pearls and rubies and with every kind of precious stone. Sell it in the bazaar, and you won't have to work as a woodcutter anymore, you will be a rich man.'

'No, brother Snake, I would do anything for you, but don't ask me to cut off your head. I'd rather stay poor.'

'What do you care, brother?' said the Snake. 'You do what I tell you. It's my own head.' The Snake insisted the Woodcutter chop off its head and tail. And the Woodcutter did so, and took the rest of the Snake home with him, buried it in his backyard, and built a handsome chapel over it.

A month, two months, three months passed, and one day the Woodcutter opened the door of the chapel and went in, and what did he see? A pomegranate tree growing right in the chapel and loaded with fruit.

'Let me see what's in these pomegranates,' he said, as he picked a pomegranate and sliced it in two. It was packed full of pearls and diamonds and rubies and all kinds of precious stones.

'Glory be to God! I was killing myself trying to make a living selling brushwood in the bazaar. I'll sell this pomegranate.'

He was so excited he couldn't sleep that night. Early the next morning the Woodcutter was off to the bazaar with a pomegranate in his pocket. He showed it to one jeweller after another, but nobody bought it. He wandered around in the bazaar trying to find a buyer and at last ran into a sharp trader.

'Brother, let me see what you have for sale,' said this man.

'Diamonds and pearls.' And he showed the man his pomegranate.

'How much do you want for these?'

'Whatever you think they are worth.'

'Would you take a thousand silver pieces for each?'

'He is laughing at me,' the Woodcutter thought. But the man counted out a thousand silver pieces for each stone and bought them all.

'Have you got any more?'

Apples of Immortality

'I have plenty more at home. Will you buy them?'

'I will,' said the man.

The happy Woodcutter hurried home, picked a few more pomegranates, and sold them to this man at the same price, 1,000 silver pieces for each stone. He became as rich as a king.

People wondered how a wretchedly poor Woodcutter, in need of his daily bread, could make so much money in such a short time. There was a very rich merchant living in that town who said to himself: 'I want to get to the bottom of this. I'm sure he didn't earn his wealth as a Woodcutter. I'll find out his secret!'

This merchant had an eye on the Woodcutter's fortune and inquired here and there, but nobody could tell him a thing. So he sent for an old hag and asked her: 'Do you know the Woodcutter who suddenly has become so rich?'

'Yes, I know him very well. Why do you ask?'

'Find out who gave him all this wealth.'

'That wouldn't be too hard.'

'Come and tell me his secret and I'll reward you with any amount of money you want.'

The old woman put on her filthiest rags and went straight to the Woodcutter's house.

'I am a poor homeless woman,' she said. 'Let me fetch your water and sweep your house and work as your servant for a crust of dry bread.'

'We need somebody to do the cooking and washing and cleaning for us,' said the Woodcutter and his wife, and took her in.

The old woman proved to be such a good servant, keeping herself busy all day with household chores, that in three months she won the love and confidence of the Woodcutter and his wife, and became like a mother to them.

One day when the old woman was alone in the house with the Woodcutter's wife she said to her mistress: 'I want to ask you a question, but I don't know if you would care to answer it.'

'What do you want to know?'

'Well, I can't help wondering how you became so rich. It's got me puzzled. You didn't become so rich by just working, did you? Or because you found a treasure. Won't you tell me the truth? I am like your mother in this house. You can trust me. I won't breathe a word about it to anyone.'

That was one secret the Woodcutter's wife could not reveal to her servant, but in the end the old hag got it out of her.

The Woodcutter

'We were very poor,' said the Woodcutter's wife. 'One day my husband saw a Snake while gathering brushwood. "Brother Woodcutter," said the Snake, "you pick up all the brushwood around here and don't leave a single twig for the birds." "What can I do, brother Snake?" said my husband. "I am a poor man, and this is how I make my living." "Then you had better kill me," said the Snake. "Chop off my head and my tail, bury the rest of me in your backyard, and build a chapel over my grave. In a few months you'll see a pomegranate tree growing in the chapel loaded with pomegranates—great big ones, packed with diamonds and pearls and rubies and all kinds of precious stones. Take them to the bazaar and sell them," said the Snake, "and you won't have to work as a Woodcutter any more."

'And that's what my husband did, and would you believe it? Everything the Snake told him came true! Look, do you see that chapel? The pomegranate tree grows in that chapel, and there are more pomegranates on it than you can count. If we pick and sell one, twenty more grow in its place.'

'May God make you a thousand times richer,' said the old hag.

'Be sure you keep it all to yourself. Not a word to anyone, or it would be the end of me. My husband would never forgive me.'

'Don't worry, I am not a child, your secret stays with me.'

But the very next day the old woman went to the merchant and told him everything.

'Good,' said the merchant. 'Now I know.' He filled the old hag's apron with gold coins and sent her off.

One day some time later the merchant called on the Woodcutter.

'Greetings, brother Woodcutter.'

'A thousand greetings to you, my friend.'

'Brother Woodcutter, may I ask you a question?'

'Ask two if you like.'

'I just want to know the truth. You are rolling in wealth. Where did it all come from?'

'From the sweat of my brow. What did you think?'

'Come now, tell me the truth.'

'I am telling you the truth.'

'I'll wager you are lying.'

'What do you want to bet on?'

'If you win,' said the merchant, 'everything I own is yours. My house, all my possessions, everything. If you lose, you lose everything you own.'

'Fair enough,' said the Woodcutter.

Apples of Immortality

They repeated their bet before witnesses.

'Now tell these men how I earned my wealth,' said the Woodcutter.

'There is a chapel in your backyard, and in the chapel grows a pomegranate tree . . .'

'That's enough,' the Woodcutter cut him short. 'You win. Everything I own, my house, all my possessions, are lawfully yours. I'll go back to being a woodcutter. God is merciful. He gave it, and he took it back.'

The Woodcutter led his wife out of their house, holding her hand, and rented an old hovel where they lived as they used to. At daybreak he took his axe, threw the rope over his shoulder, and went off to the woods as he had done for years. His wife knew that the merchant learned their secret from the old hag who worked for them, but she was afraid to tell her husband about it.

A week went by, then two weeks, a month, two months, and one day the Woodcutter thought to himself: 'Brother, this makes no sense, I can't work it out. I'll go and complain to God. How did I sin against God? Why did I lose everything God gave me?'

The Woodcutter talked it over with his wife and she said: 'O my husband, you know best. If you think it would do us any good, then go and complain to God.'

The Woodcutter packed his bag with enough food to last him a few months, seized his walking stick, and started out on his wanderings to find God. Heaven only knows how far he went until he met two mules running wild in the woods, and saw the sores on their backs.

'Where are you going?' the mules asked him.

'I am going to complain to God.'

'Complain about us too. It's been years now that we've been covered with sores. And they don't heal. We too are God's creatures. Why should we suffer like this?'

'I will tell God,' the Woodcutter promised.

The Woodcutter kept going and reached a town where he met two beautiful maidens, just like two beams of sunlight.

'Where are you going?' they asked him.

'I am going to complain to God.'

'Then complain about us too. Other maidens not half as pretty as we are have found husbands, but we remain single, and our father is well-to-do. Ask God what will become of us without husbands. Aren't we God's creatures?'

'I will ask him,' the Woodcutter promised.

[He walked to the ends of the earth looking for God, and at last met an

The Woodcutter

old man with a white beard sitting by the roadside, and bowed before him.

‘Greetings, pappy!’

‘A thousand greetings to you. Who are you?’

‘Just a Woodcutter.’

‘Where are you going?’

‘I am going to complain to God.’

‘You came to the right person. I am God. What’s your complaint?’

The Woodcutter dropped on his knees and told God about the two beautiful maidens he met on his way.

‘Take them along on your way back and marry them off to a couple of good men. Any other complaint?’

He told God about the two mules.

‘I created those mules as beasts of burden for man,’ God said. ‘But they are running wild in the woods, doing nothing. They have to work if they want to get rid of their sores. Take them along, saddle them, put them to work. And when they work their sores will heal. And other complaint?’

The Woodcutter finally told God about his own troubles, how he lost everything he had.

‘Go home now and make another wager with that merchant,’ God said. ‘Ask him, “Does the sun rise in the east or in the west?” “Of course in the east,” the merchant will say. You tell him the sun rises in the west. Don’t be afraid to say so. I shall see to it that you win your wager this time.’

The Woodcutter kissed God’s hand and as he turned to go, God ascended to heaven.

He went back by the same road, walking on and on until he reached the town where he met the two maidens.

‘God heard your complaint,’ he told them. ‘He ordered me to take you along on my way back and to marry you off to a couple of good men. Are you willing to go with me?’

‘We are willing,’ the maidens said. ‘We obey God’s order.’

They travelled together, and ran across the two mules.

‘Brother Woodcutter,’ the mules said, ‘did you see God? Did you tell him our complaint?’

‘Yes, I saw God.’

‘What did God say?’

‘“I created them as beasts of burden for man,” God said. “Take them

Apples of Immortality

along on your way back and put them to work. Their sores will heal when they work." Are you willing to go with me?"

'Of course we are willing,' the mules said.

The Woodcutter saddled the mules right then and there and the sores on their backs healed as the maidens rode the mules all the way to the Woodcutter's town. And soon everybody knew the Woodcutter was back in town with a couple of peri-like maidens, and the merchant hastened to greet him and to welcome him home.

The merchant eyed the two stunning maidens and thought to himself:

'He can't support them. He has nothing left to his name. I'll take them away from him.'

'Brother Woodcutter, it's good to see you back safe and sound. Where did you find these good-looking maidens? How much would you want for them?'

'They are not for sale. But if you like, I'll make another wager with you.'

'What shall we bet on this time?'

'Tell before all these people where the sun rises.'

The merchant pointed to the east and said: 'The sun rises in the east. Everybody knows that.'

'No, you are wrong. I'll bet you anything that tomorrow morning the sun rises in the west.'

People groaned and shook their heads. How could the Woodcutter say such a foolish thing?

'I accept your wager,' the merchant said. 'If I am right, these two maidens are mine. If I am wrong, my house and possessions and everything I own are yours.'

'You will lose again,' people told the Woodcutter.

'God is merciful, we'll see tomorrow morning who is right, the merchant or I.'

People could not sleep that night thinking of this new wager, and prayed for the Woodcutter.

The next morning at daybreak the Woodcutter and the merchant went off with their witnesses to watch the sun rise from a height outside the city, where a crowd began to gather.

'Look carefully,' the Woodcutter said to the merchant.

The merchant was looking east when the sun rose in the west, and his blood froze in his veins. It was an incredible thing, the sun rising in the west. All who were watching the sun were flabbergasted and stared at the sun and at one another with unbelieving eyes.

The Woodcutter

‘Well, merchant, do I win our bet or not?’ said the Woodcutter.

‘You win. Everything I own, my house, my possessions, are all lawfully yours.’

‘No, my good man, I don’t want your house and possessions,’ said the Woodcutter. ‘Just give me back what you won from me, and keep what is lawfully yours.’

The merchant returned everything that belonged to the Woodcutter, who became a rich man again. And now both men were wealthy.

As for the two beautiful maidens, the son of the king’s chamberlain married one of them, and the son of the king’s councillor married the other. The double wedding was celebrated with drums and bagpipes and amid great rejoicings for seven days and seven nights.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller’s words.

TALE OF THE HUNTER'S SON

Once upon a time a hunter and his wife had an only son. After the old hunter died his wife, a wise woman, sent the lad to school. He was a bright boy and learned a lot. But one day when he was nearly fifteen he said to his mother: 'I want to be a hunter like my father. Give me his flintlock, and maybe I'll learn to be a good shot like my father.'

'Son, you shouldn't give up your schooling,' she said. But he was now old enough to earn a living and was his mother's sole support. So she gave him his father's flintlock and said: 'If somebody wants to buy this flintlock, don't sell it. Keep it always with you. And hunt only in the daytime. Be sure you get home before dark.'

In a few years the lad became a great hunter. There wasn't a better shot in the whole kingdom. One day he went to Mt Ararat to shoot antelopes. He tramped all day on the slopes of the mountain without finding any antelopes, and when it got too dark to go home he said to himself: 'I'd better sleep here tonight and go home in the morning. I can sleep in one of these big trees and be safe from the wild beasts.'

So he hid himself in the hollow of a big tree, and fell asleep. He woke up in the middle of the night and saw that the woods on Mt Ararat were aglow as though by fireworks. His gaze fell upon a wild beast lying under the tree where he slept and giving off a brilliant light, like an immense diamond glittering in the sun.

The boy was frightened. His heart almost stopped beating. Never in his life had he seen anything like this wonderful beast. He thought of shooting it, but was afraid he might miss and then the enraged beast would climb the tree and pull him to pieces. He wondered what he should do. At length he said: 'O Lord, my God, I rely upon thee,' took aim and fired. He shot the beast dead on the spot.

He slid down the tree and tried to drag the huge beast to his village, but it was too heavy to be carried that far, and so he skinned it, like an



expert, rolled up the lustrous hide, swung it to his back, and started for home.

His mother was astonished to see the hide, and asked him where he had been all night. He told her he went to shoot antelopes on Mt Ararat and shot a strange light-giving beast instead. 'I'll take this hide to the king, he said.

'Son, you will be sorry if you do, and you will be sorry if you don't,' said his mother.

The next morning he went to the palace with the big lustrous hide on his back.

'What have you got on your back?' the king's chamberlain asked him.

'The skin of a wild beast I shot last night on Mt Ararat. It shines like the sun.'

The lad unrolled it, and the chamberlain marvelled at its brilliant beauty.

'I will pay you a hundred silver pieces for this hide.'

'It's not for sale. I want to give it to the king, as a present.'

The chamberlain then offered to buy his flintlock; the boy refused to sell it and would not even let him touch his flintlock.

The king was mighty pleased with this rare gift and said: 'Chamberlain, give him a reward from my treasury.'

The chamberlain, a mean and envious man, led the hunter's son to the royal treasury, gave him two copper coins, boxed his ears, and sent him home.

'Son, what did the king give you for the hide?' his mother asked.

Apples of Immortality

'These two copper coins and a couple of slaps from his chamberlain.'

The boy felt so humiliated that he did not complain even to the king.

The king hung the skin from the balcony of his palace, and at night it illuminated the whole city, as though the sun were still shining.

The chamberlain bowed before the throne and said: 'O king, you should build an ivory castle to go with this marvellous skin!'

'An ivory castle, eh? You have spoken well, my chamberlain. But where can I get the ivory to build it with?'

'May the king live long, the hunter's son who brought you this amazing skin can also fetch the ivory, I am sure.'

The youth was summoned at once to the palace and the king said to him: 'I want to build an ivory castle, and I expect you to fetch all the ivory I will need for it.'

The boy bowed, and went home.

'What happened? Why do you look so sad?' his mother asked him.

'The king wants to build an ivory castle and ordered me to deliver the ivory he will need for it. Where can I get all that ivory?'

'Son, I'll tell you where you can get it. Ask the king to give you one hundred men, three hundred goatskins of wine and three hundred goatskins of brandy, and tell him the chamberlain should pay for them out of his own purse, or you can't do it, you will lose your talisman. Go to Mt Aragaz, and find the pool of water where the elephants drink. Empty the pool and fill it with wine and brandy. The elephants will come to the pool during the midday heat, and they will get so drunk on the wine and brandy that they will stagger and fall. That's when you have to slaughter them with your men. Load their tusks on your carts and take them to the palace.'

The hunter's son went back to the palace and asked for one hundred men, three hundred goatskins of wine and three hundred goatskins of brandy. 'May the king live long, your chamberlain has to pay for them out of his own purse,' he said. 'I can't get the ivory you ordered if you pay for it yourself. It will ruin my talisman if you do.'

The king commanded that the men, the wine, the brandy the hunter's son asked for should be given to him at once, and that the chamberlain should pay for them out of his own purse.

The hunter's son sprang onto a horse and led his convoy to Mt Aragaz. He did what his mother told him, and came back with his carts loaded with elephant tusks. The chamberlain was dumbfounded. The king was mighty pleased and ordered a handsome reward for the brave boy. The chamberlain took him to the treasury, gave him four copper coins, and

Tale of the Hunter's Son

boxed his ears. 'This is the reward you get,' he said. The boy was too ashamed to complain even to the king and went home crestfallen.

'Why do you look so sad?' his mother asked him.

'I got another beating from the chamberlain, and these four copper coins, for all the trouble I went through to get the ivory.'

Master craftsmen built a splendid ivory castle, and the king was happy as a boy of fifteen. His chamberlain said: 'O king, you would be even happier if you had the Tree of Paradise growing at your door.'

'Who can bring me the Tree of Paradise?'

'The hunter's son.'

The hunter's son was summoned at once to the ivory castle.

'Son, you must now bring me the Tree of Paradise,' the king told him.

The boy went home crestfallen.

'Why do you look so sad?' his mother asked him again.

'The devil take him. The king now wants the Tree of Paradise from me.'

'It's all the chamberlain's doing. Don't blame the king for it. Ask him to give you a ship loaded with 40 tons of wheat, 40 tons of millet, and 40 tons of rice, and as you sail along the coast scatter all of this grain in the sea. There has been a famine in the sea. The fish queen alone can give you the Tree of Paradise.'

The king supplied the ship and the grain the hunter's son asked for, and made the chamberlain pay for them out of his own purse so that the young hunter would not lose his talisman.

The lad sailed up and down the coast, dumping the grain in the waters. The fish queen came up from the bottom of the sea and cried: 'Thank you, son! After starving for seven years we now have plenty of grain to feed on.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said the hunter's son.

'I want to reward you for your kindness.'

'I want no reward,' he said.

'Don't be so shy. Tell me son, your heart's dearest wish.'

'Well, if you insist, I wouldn't mind having the Tree of Paradise.'

'That's a hard one! But I promise to give you the Tree of Paradise even at the risk of my life. Have you got a sharp knife on you?'

'Yes, it's sharp.'

'Cut off a bit of my fin. Wherever you plant it, it will grow into the Tree of Paradise.'

The big fish rose high enough over the water for the hunter's son to cut off a piece of its fin.

Apples of Immortality

The hunter's son sailed back and hastened to the ivory castle with the fish fin in his pocket, wrapped in a piece of paper. He bowed before the king and said: 'I brought the Tree of Paradise. Where shall I plant it?'

'Plant it right under the window of my ivory room!' the king said.

The youth planted the fish fin secretly at night. When the king awoke the next morning his chamber was dark, and he had difficulty opening the window. The Tree of Paradise reached up to his window, and the king breathed in its heavenly fragrance. Birds twittered and sang in the branches. It bore fruit ripe on one side of the tree and green on the other side, as though it were summer on one side and winter on the other. The king was overjoyed and sent for the hunter's son. He had the boy sit beside him and treated him as though he were his own son.

'Chamberlain, take our boy to the treasury and give him all the gold he wants.'

The chamberlain gave him six copper coins, and slapped him again.

The boy went home crestfallen.

'Why are you so sad?' his mother asked him again.

'All I got for the Tree of Paradise was another beating, and these six copper coins.'

Consumed with envy, the chamberlain had a new scheme for getting rid of the youth. He went to the king's chamber, bowed and said: 'May the king live long, what's the use of having the Tree of Paradise, and living in an ivory castle the like of which the world has never seen before, and at night illuminating your city with this lustrous skin without a beautiful bride to enjoy them with you? My king's happiness would be complete with a bride worthy of being his queen. Why not wed Perizak, the lovely daughter of King Lems?'

'You have spoken well, my chamberlain, but who can bring me that lovely maiden?'

'The hunter's son can fetch her, I am sure.'

And again the king sent for the youth and said: 'Son, now bring me the daughter of King Lems. I want to make her my wife. I expect you to be back with my bride in thirty days.'

The youth went home crestfallen. His mother asked him: 'What happened now? Why do you look so sad?'

'The king wants me to fetch the daughter of King Lems. How can I kidnap a king's daughter? I'll lose my head if I try, and I'll lose it if I don't.'

'Son, you can do it. You have already performed two most difficult tasks

Tale of the Hunter's Son

for the king. King Lems lives in his castle on an island, so very far away from here that I can't tell you much about him. King Lems scarcely sees anyone. He lives like a recluse on his island. But both he and his daughter are mad about music. Now go back to the king and ask for a special ship to be built for you, a ship as large as this city, with your own cabin to be as big as the ivory castle. Tell the king you'll need a hundred lute players aboard, and a hundred pipers, and a hundred drummers, and a hundred male dancers and singers, and a hundred female dancers and singers, and a hundred men and a hundred women neither too young nor too old to feast and make merry with them every day, from morning to night—exactly as people do in Tiflis—with enough food and wine to last them forty years. Have the ship sheeted in gold, and all aboard should wear gold-embroidered clothes.'

The youth went back to the ivory castle, and the king heard his request and promised to have everything ready for him. And again, the chamberlain paid for the ship and its crew out of his own purse, and had to sell everything he owned to raise the funds needed for this voyage. The ship was built, as the hunter's son wanted it, and he was ready to sail. His mother kissed him on both cheeks and said:

'May God be with you. From now on you are on your own. I told you all I know about King Lems.'

He kissed her on her breast, and sailed away without much hope of coming back alive.

Heaven only knows how far the hunter's son sailed over treacherous seas to reach the island of King Lems. He ran the ship aground and told his crew to stay aboard and enjoy themselves while he explored the island before deciding on his next move.

The youth made his way through a large dense forest and came upon a man busy pulling up enormous trees by their roots and planting them elsewhere.

'How can you be that strong?' the boy asked in surprise.

'This is nothing. What amazes me is what a hunter's son did.'

'What did he do?'

'He skinned a beast that shone like the sun. He slaughtered a whole herd of elephants. He got the Tree of Paradise. I don't know how he did it.'

'I am that hunter's son.'

'Then I am your brother and I am going along with you.'

They walked on together and came to a town where they saw a man eating all the bread and meat people piled up before him, mounds and mounds of food, and still crying:

Apples of Immortality

'I am starving to death.'

'How can you put away all that food and still be hungry?' the hunter's son asked him.

'This is nothing. What amazes me is what a hunter's son did.'

'What did he do?'

'He skinned a beast that shone like the sun. He slaughtered a whole herd of elephants. He got the Tree of Paradise. I don't know how he did it.'

'I am that hunter's son.'

'Then I am your brother, and I am going along with you.'

They travelled together and on their way met a man drinking up a river and crying, 'I am dying of thirst!'

'You will blow up with all that water in your belly,' the hunter's son said.

'This isn't much of a trick. What amazes me is what a young hunter did.'

'What did he do?'

'He skinned a beast that shone like the sun. He slaughtered a whole herd of elephants. He got the Tree of Paradise.'

'I am that hunter.'

'Then I am your brother, and I am going along with you.'

The four of them travelled together like brothers, and saw a man standing on his head.

'What are you standing on your head for?' the hunter's son asked him.

'Because I can hear what people say when I stand on my head. I was waiting for you. I'll go along with you. Let us be five brothers.'

They went on and on, and presently the Tree-Pulling Man asked the hunter's son: 'What is your dearest wish?'

'My dearest wish right now is to kidnap the daughter of King Lems.'

'Let's go kidnap her then!' the others shouted as if with one voice.

The five brothers marched off to King Lem's city and sat on the stone-bench before the royal castle. The king's chamberlain showed them to the guest house, where they waited, wondering what would happen next. The Listener stood on his head and heard what the king and his councillors were saying in another part of the castle.

'Brothers, we are in trouble!' cried the Listener.

'Why? What did you hear?'

'The king will give a feast for us tomorrow, and will cut off our heads

Tale of the Hunter's Son

if we don't eat all the food that's being cooked for us—enough food to feed his army.'

'Oh, that's nothing to worry about,' said the Man-Who-Was-Always-Hungry. 'I can eat all that food myself.'

They lay down to sleep, had a good night's rest. And the next day the Man-Who-Was-Always-Hungry ate all the food the king's men piled on the table before him, and he kept muttering, 'I am starving to death.' He left nothing for his brothers to eat, and they had to be fed separately at another table.

In the evening, at bedtime, the Listener stood on his head and listened again to what the king and his councillors said among themselves.

'Brothers, we are done for this time!' the Listener cried. 'The king has a ferocious lion, and if we can't wrestle with the beast tomorrow, he will cut off our heads.'

'Brothers, don't lose any sleep over such a trifle,' said the Tree-Pulling-Man. 'I can take care of the lion. Leave it to me.'

And the next morning, by the king's order, they had to march out to the arena to wrestle with the lion. The Tree-Pulling-Man tore the lion in two.

The king and his councillors wondered what they should do next. 'Let's blow them up in their room, and that will be the end of them!' said the chamberlain. The Listener was standing on his head, hearing every word they said. He cried out in a panicky voice: 'Brothers, let's get out of here fast before they blow up this room!'

'Calm down,' said the River-Drinker, 'that's nothing to worry about.' He went down to a river, sucked it dry, came back, and let out such a powerful stream of water that it soaked up the very bowels of the earth. The king's men could not fire the powder; it turned to mud under the room.

'I give up,' said King Lems. 'I'm afraid this young hunter will take my daughter away from me.'

'Give me your daughter and I will go back to my floating city,' the hunter's son said to King Lems.

'Before I give you my daughter I want to see your floating city, I want to know how you live,' King Lems said.

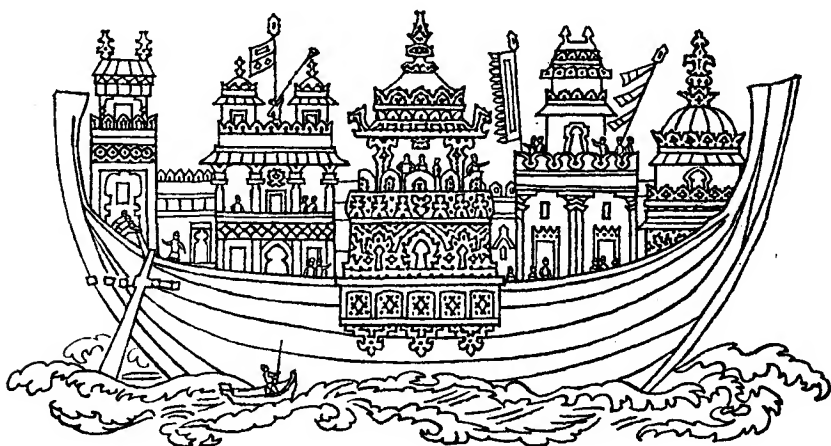
'I'll be glad to show it to you,' said the hunter's son.

They rode out to the ship he had run aground and King Lems was astonished, and delighted with the music, the dancing, the feasting and

Apples of Immortality

merry-making that went on from morning to night without a stop. And he saw that people in this city wore gold-embroidered clothes. Everybody seemed so happy that King Lems said: 'I'll gladly give you my daughter, but you must also have her consent.'

Princess Perizak wanted to see her suitor's floating city for herself, and the hunter's son was very glad to have her aboard. The princess was



young and fun-loving. And she danced and sang now with one group, now with another on this merry ship, and wasn't at all anxious to go home. All five brothers were aboard now, manning their posts and ready to carry out the young hunter's orders.

The ship suddenly lurched forward and moved away from the shore. The princess wasn't aware of it until she found herself in the middle of the sea, when she was still singing and dancing with the merry-makers.

'Hey, what is this?' she cried out. 'We are sailing!'

'I'm taking you away with me, you are being kidnapped,' said the hunter's son.

'You can't kidnap me! I have my own talisman.' And the princess threw her head-veil into the waters.

The ship turned around and headed back toward the coast.

'No, I won't let you go back,' said the hunter's son.

The fish queen came up. 'Huh, what's the trouble, son?'

'Princess Perizak threw her head-veil into the waters and made my ship turn back. I don't want her to slip out of my hands.'

The big fish picked up the veil and gave it to the hunter's son—and the ship changed course and sailed away from the coast. The princess drew

Tale of the Hunter's Son

her knife and tossed it into the waves—and the ship changed course again.

The big fish came up again and asked: 'Huh, what's the trouble now?'

'She threw her knife into the sea.'

'I'll get it for you.'

The fish disappeared in the waves and came up with the knife. The hunter's son took the knife and hid it in his pocket. And the ship turned toward the open sea.

The princess said: 'I told you you can't kidnap me. I am going back. Nobody can stop me!' And she threw a needle into the sea.

The big fish ordered all the little fishes swarming about the ship to find the needle. One of them found it and leaping out of the waters gave it to the hunter's son. The ship turned around and sailed once again in the right direction. The princess gave up. Her talismans were of no further use to her. Her spell was broken.

'Very well, I will marry you,' she said.

They sat down to another feast, and his four brothers shared their table.

'Tell me,' the princess asked, 'did you kidnap me for yourself, or for somebody else?'

'For somebody else. The king.'

'The king! Why, he must be sixty or seventy years old! You must be out of your mind. I'll not marry anyone but you.'

The Tree-Pulling strongman said: 'Brothers, we won't let anybody stand in our way. Let's make our brother, the hunter's son, king!'

And as soon as they landed the five brothers rode out to the ivory castle with the beautiful Princess Perizak, and killed the chamberlain who planned for the young hunter's death by sending him on this dangerous voyage. The Lion-Killer flattened the chamberlain to the ground with one blow. The five brothers banished the king and all his councillors from the kingdom and proclaimed the hunter's son king.

They invited the whole city to the wedding-feast, and it lasted for seven days and seven nights. The hunter's son ascended the throne and made his four brothers his chamberlain and councillors.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

Three apples fell from heaven, one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

SUN-MAID AND DRAGON-PRINCE

Once upon a time there was a king who had no children. The court healers could not help him, and every day the king hunted in the mountains to forget his grief. One day he saw a snake coiled lovingly around its young, and the sight stirred him so deeply that he sighed: 'O God, am I not even as good as a snake that you leave me childless and torture me like this?'

The king could not get this snake out of his mind and brooded over it. Merciful God heard his plea, and the queen gave birth to a child that was half human, half serpent. It grew so fast that in a week the king had a dragon on his hands—a dragon with a fierce appetite for young maidens. The king's men had to feed it a young maiden every day. It would eat nothing else.

The king's men scoured the countryside gathering homeless young girls, and one day they brought in a girl with long golden hair, whose name was Arevhat—Sun-Maid.

By now the dragon was an ugly monster and no one dared go near it, and it had to be fed older girls. Sun-Maid was dropped in from an opening in the roof of the den where the dragon was kept, and as she fell to the floor she broke a tooth. The dragon was ready to devour her alive when she said with the sweetest smile:

'Good morning, king's son!'

The dragon was so startled by her friendly greeting that it burst wide open, and out sprang a most handsome youth who raised her up and took her in his arms. He replaced her broken tooth with a precious stone that added to the lustre of her smile and was reflected on his own face.

The king's men came back and peered down from the roof to see if the maiden was still alive. They found her hugging a handsome youth. There was no dragon in the den.

Sun-Maid and Dragon-Prince

‘Why do you keep all these doors shut? Leave them open,’ the youth said.

They opened the doors and ran to the king. ‘Your dragon has turned into a most wonderful boy!’ they cried. ‘And the maiden is alive.’

The king rushed to the den and said: ‘Good morning, son.’

The young couple stood up and bowed before the king, who could not wish for a better son than this splendid lad, and as for the girl, she was a sweet, modest maiden. They were like a pair of angels dropped from heaven, and they had eyes only for each other.

The king’s palace rang with joyous voices and congratulations.

‘Son, you can have anything you like,’ said the happy king.

‘May the king live long, I want to make Arevhat my wife.’

The wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights and everybody drank to the health and happiness of the young couple.

After the wedding the king drew Sun-Maid aside and said: ‘Tell me, my child, whose daughter are you?’

And Sun-maid said: ‘May the king live long, after my mother died and my father married again I lived with my stepmother. Every morning my stepmother gave me a pound of wool and said: “Take the cows out to pasture, and be sure you spin all of this wool before you come back.” I had nothing to eat all day but a crust of dry bread, and she wouldn’t even let me eat all of it. I had to take half of my portion back.

‘One day I was standing on a rock in the pasture and spinning wool when I dropped my spindle, and it fell into a cave below. I bent down to look for it, and saw an old woman sitting in the cave. I said: “Nanny, I dropped my spindle, will you please give it to me?” She said: “Come and get it, my child. I am too old to move.” “Where is the door?” I asked her. “You can come in through the glen,” she said. I went in through the glen and bent down to pick up my spindle, and when I turned around, I saw no door. I said: “Nanny, what happened to the door?” She said, “Come here, my child, I want to speak to you. I will show you the door later.”

‘I went up to the old woman and she said: “Take up this broom and sweep my house.”

‘I took the broom and swept her house. The old woman said: “Tell me, my dear, whose house is cleaner, yours or mine?” I said: “Nanny, your house is cleaner.” It wasn’t; it was filthy. Then she said: “Come sit down beside me.” I sat down beside the old woman and she laid her head in my lap and asked me to comb her hair. “Tell me, my child, whose hair is cleaner, mine or your mother’s?” she asked. ‘Nanny dear, your hair is

cleaner," I said, although it was full of lice. Then she said: "I am getting sleepy. Let me sleep with my head in your lap. You will see some black water flowing by while I sleep. Don't wake me up and tell me about it. Then you will see red water. Don't tell me about it. Wake me up when you see yellow water."

Soon the old woman was fast asleep, and I saw black water, but said nothing. I saw red water, and said nothing. When I saw yellow water I said: "Nanny, nanny, get up, here is the yellow water!" She got up, seized me by the legs, and pushed my head into the yellow water. My hair turned completely gold. Then the old woman showed me the door and said, "Well, my child, you can go now, and may God be with you."

I came out of the cave thinking: What shall I do now? How can I go home with my golden hair? My stepmother will beat me and tear off all of it. And she did beat me. She was furious when I told her how my hair turned gold. She said: "You shameless hussy, I want you to take my daughter to that cave first thing tomorrow morning, and don't come back until her hair is golden like yours."

The next morning at daybreak, my stepmother drove the cattle out of the barn, and my stepsister went to the meadow with me. I showed her the cave. She stood on the same rock while spinning her wool, and her spindle fell into the cave below. She saw the old woman and said in an angry voice, 'Nanny, give me that spindle.' The old woman said: 'My child, come and get it, I can't rise to my feet, I am too old to move.' My sister asked, "Where is the door?" "Come in through the glen," the old woman said. She went in through the glen, as I had done, and the door disappeared while she was bending down to pick up her spindle. She said: "Nanny, I can't see the door, where is it?" And the old woman said: "Come here, my child. Take this broom and sweep our house." After my sister swept the cave, the old woman asked her: "Tell me, my child, whose house is cleaner, mine or your mother's?" My sister answered in the same angry voice: "Our house is clean, yours is filthy." "Well, never mind, I am too old to keep my house clean, who will sweep it for me? Come, my child, sit down beside me and let me put my head in your lap." After my sister combed out her hair the old woman asked her: "Whose hair is cleaner, mine or your mother's?" "My mother's, of course, your hair is full of lice," my sister answered.

The old woman said: "My child, let me take my nap with my head resting in your lap. You will see some yellow water flowing by while I sleep. Don't wake me up and tell me about it. Then you will see red water. Don't tell me about it. Wake me up when you see black water."

The old woman dozed off and my sister said nothing when she saw yellow water, said nothing when she saw red water, but woke her up when she saw black water. The old woman grabbed her by the legs and dumped her into the black water. The poor girl turned black from head to foot. The old woman said: "My child, you can go now, the door is open."

'My sister picked up her spindle and came out of the cave. I was horror-struck when I saw her so black. We went home, and my step-mother took her stick and beat me and drove me out of the house. I went out to the open fields and sat under a tree, crying, with no home, nowhere to go, when your men came and seized me, and brought me here. I asked them, "Where are you taking me?" And they said, "We are taking you to the king's son."'

Soon after the wedding, Dragon-Prince went off to war with his father. Before leaving he said to the queen-mother: 'Don't let my bride go anywhere, not even to see her parents.' But Sun-Maid's stepmother was capable of a thousand deviltries and could not forgive the girl for her good fortune. She made Sun-Maid's father go to the king's palace and say to the queen-mother: 'We miss our daughter very much, and would like to have her back with us for a few days.'

The queen-mother felt sorry for the man and let him take his daughter home for a few days. Sun-Maid went down to the river bank with her stepmother and sister to help with the family washing, and the step-mother kicked the girl into a deep part of the river. Then she sent word to the queen-mother that Sun-Maid had accidentally drowned in the river.

The poor girl saved her life by clinging to a log as she was carried away by the swift stream, and was washed ashore in a desolate land far from her native village. She struggled out of the river, naked, and started walking in the scorching heat. She wore a grass dress she made, and tramped across the barren wastes, praying to God to save her in this wilderness. She sat down on a rock to rest, then continued walking with tears in her eyes, dragging her feet. At last she came to a rude shack built of reeds and tree-branches, and leaning against a cave. Peering in through the door she saw a man sleeping inside. She sat down by the door and waited.

The man, a young hunter and warrior, rose after the sun went down. He was taken aback when he saw her at his door. Taking her for a ghost, he crossed himself several times as he kept staring at her with

Apples of Immortality

unbelieving eyes. When he realized she was harmless he asked her: 'Who are you? Why did you come here? How did you get here?'

Sun-Maid told him who she was and what she had been through. And he told her about himself.

‘I am the son of a very rich man,’ he said. ‘I had nothing to do at home but hunt every day and enjoy life. Once, for three days, I had a streak of bad luck and found nothing to shoot, and it made me so angry that I wanted to shoot the sun. I did not care if I plunged the whole world into darkness. I raised my bow, aiming it at the sun, when a flaming hand slapped me down, grabbed me by the hair and flung me to this desolate land, where I have to live in darkness. A voice cursed me and said I should never see the sun again, that I’ll drop dead if I do. So I sleep during the day and go out only after dark. I do all my hunting at night to provide myself with food.’

Sun-Maid lived with this man in his little shack. He was like a dead man when the sun was up. She kept herself busy during the day while he lay unconscious, and went off hunting at night. Three years passed, and she was with child. They did not want to rear their child in this wilderness and he decided to send her home to his parents before the baby was born. So the Hunter took her to the town where his parents lived, travelling by night, and turned back before sunrise at the edge of the town. She followed his directions to his parents’ house and handed a note to his father: ‘I am sending you my wife. Take good care of her, but don’t try to find me. I’ll die if I ever see daylight.’

They took her in. Her child was born in its father’s house. Sun-Maid rocked her baby in its cradle and sang lullabies, telling the child about her sad life as a young girl, and how her hair turned gold, and how she was pushed into the river by her stepmother. The baby’s father came night after night to see his child through the window. He never went into the house and rode off before daybreak. His parents thought his wife had a secret lover, and questioned her about it.

‘My caller is your own son,’ she said. ‘He comes to see our baby through the window. He never steps into my room. And don’t you ever bring him into the house. He will die if you do.’

‘You are lying!’ they said, and would not believe her.

They caught him the next night, dragged him in, and saw that he was indeed their own son.

‘Let me go!’ he cried. ‘I have to be back in my cave-shack before the sun rises, or I’ll be dead. A curse lies on my head, let me go . . .’

They loved their son so much they kept him in their house and



would not let him go. He was like a dead man the next morning. They wept, they beat their heads with rocks in their hands, they did everything they could to revive him, but he showed no sign of life.

Then a few nights later, a voice told his mother in a dream : 'Go west in iron shoes if you expect to find a cure for your son.'

The woman went west, travelling to the ends of the earth, and when her iron shoes were torn apart she came to a lofty palace of dazzling blue marble. She entered through the gate and passed through one court after another and through a series of twelve arcades where she saw innumerable stars lying around in deep sleep. The courts shimmered with blue pools, and fountains splashed in the awesome hush. She saw no trees, no green, no beast or fowl, and no human beings, white or black, in this castle-of-the-sun. A gold pavilion gleamed in the centre, and inside this pavilion lay a queenly lady of surpassing beauty on a bed of pearls. The woman was frightened and drew back, but the queenly lady spoke to her in a friendly voice :

'No doubt you came to make a complaint, after undergoing all those hardships on the road. Tell me what's troubling you.'

'I am a mother, and I came to find a cure for my son who is deathly ill.' She told her what ailed her son and how she had tried, without success, to bring him back to life.

'I am a mother myself—the mother of the Sun—and I know how you feel. Heaven and earth are lighted by my son. But your son is a foolish boy. He wanted to shoot my son with his bow, and he has been condemned to live in darkness, deprived of the Sun's light.'

Apples of Immortality

‘Save him, for your son’s sake!’

The queenly lady took pity on her and said: ‘Many an unworthy son has enjoyed through his mother the blessings of the Sun. Hide behind these stars. My son is coming home and I don’t want you to burn to death when he gets here. He will bathe in this pool, and then I’ll suckle him at my breast. While the Sun is in bed with me take a bottle of water from this pool and go home. Sprinkle the water on your son and he will come back to life.’ }

The Sun arrived in a blaze of fiery flames and dived straight into the marble pool before the gold pavilion. The stars rose from their slumber and saluted the Sun. The Sun’s mother lifted him out of the pool and took him to bed. While she nursed the Sun-Child at her breast, and the Sun, forever young, forever newborn, sucked his mother’s milk, and the stars faded away in the sky, the woman took a bottle of water from the pool and ran out of the Castle-of-the-Sun.

She sprinkled the water on her son, and he sprang to his feet, sound and strong again. Kings and wise men came from all parts of the world to learn about this miraculous cure, and among them was Dragon-Prince, who was back from the war and wanted to know what happened to his wife. Maybe this woman could help him, he thought.

They kept Dragon-Prince for dinner, and Sun-Maid, as the bride in the house, waited on him too. She smiled when she heard him speak about his wife Arevhat, and he recognized her from the precious stone that replaced her broken tooth.

So the Hunter and Dragon-Prince decided to settle matters in an amicable manner and let Sun-Maid choose between them. ‘We’ll feed her plenty of salty roast meat,’ they said, ‘and go horseback riding with her. When she gets thirsty she will ask for water from the man she really loves.’

Sun-Maid ate the salty roast meat, and taking her baby rode out to the open fields with the two men, not suspecting their scheme.

‘May I have some water, I am thirsty,’ she said to the Hunter, who was now free to enjoy the blessings of the Sun, and the Hunter quickly dismounted and opened his flask.

‘Then she called, ‘Dragon-Prince, Dragon-Prince!’ and he too jumped from his horse and opened his flask.

She stood between the two men, holding her baby.

‘Take him, you are his father,’ she said, handing the baby to the Hunter. ‘And I belong to Dragon-Prince. I am his wife.’

And Sun-Maid drank from the flask Dragon-Prince gave her, and went home with him.

ALO-DINO AND THE NIGHTINGALE OF A THOUSAND SONGS, HAZARAN BULBUL

Once upon a time there was a king who had three sons: two were bright, the youngest was considered a fool. His name was Alo-Dino.

The king had an apple-tree in his orchard with three apples on it. And one day an old beggar came over and said to the king's gardener: 'I want one of those apples.'

'These apples are for the king only,' said the gardener. 'You can have any other fruit from this orchard you like, but not the king's apples.'

'I want an apple. I don't care for any other fruit.'

And the old beggar became so angry for not getting an apple that he put a curse on the king's orchard. Instantly all the trees shed their leaves and the whole wonderful garden dried up.

'Only Hazaran Bulbul can make this orchard bloom again,' said the old man and went his way.

When the king saw his orchard with its bare trees he scolded his gardener: 'Is this how you take care of my orchard? It's all withered and dried up.'

'An old beggar wanted me to give him an apple and I would not,' said the gardener, 'so in his rage he put a curse on our orchard. That's why it dried up. The old beggar said this orchard will never grow green again until Hazaran Bulbul sings in it.'

'Then we have to find somebody to fetch Hazaran Bulbul.'

The king's eldest son stepped forward and said: 'May the king live long, I will bring you Hazaran Bulbul.'

The middle son stepped forward and said: 'Father, I will bring it.'

Apples of Immortality

'Then both of you go together,' said the king.

The two princes mounted their horses and rode off.

'Mother, where are my brothers?' Alo-Dino asked some days later.

'Oh, you little fool, did you just wake up to ask about your brothers? They have been gone six days now to fetch Hazaran Bulbul.'

Alo-Dino went to the king's stablemaster and said: 'Saddle a fast horse for me. I am going after my brothers.'

'We have quite a lot of good horses here; pick the one you like best.'

Alo-Dino walked through the king's stables and pressed down on the back of one horse after another, and they all caved in. Only a worthless-looking horse tied separately by the door stood firm when Alo-Dino laid his hand on its back. He ordered the stablemaster to wash this mangy horse three times a day and to feed it every hour forty pounds of raisins.

Three days later Alo-Dino leapt into the saddle of this same horse and galloped off after his brothers. He soon caught up with them.

'Why are you following us, you fool?' said the eldest brother, and slapped him.

'Oh, let him come along if he wants to,' said the middle brother. 'We need a servant to take care of our horses and brew our tea.'

So the three of them rode on together and halted when the road branched out in three different directions. They saw an old man sitting at the crossroads.

'Good day, pappy.'

'God's day, king's sons.'

'Can you tell us where these three roads lead to?' asked the eldest brother.

'One leads to Tiflis, another to Erevan, and this one is the Road-of-No-Return,' said the old man.

'You two follow one of these safe roads, I will take the Road-of-No-Return,' said Alo-Dino.

'Good,' thought his eldest brother, 'We'll get rid of the fool.'

'Pappy, don't go away until all three of us are back,' said Alo-Dino.

His brothers took the safe roads. Alo-Dino rode along the Road-of-No-Return. And heaven only knows how far he went until he reached a land where the earth, the trees, the grass, the rocks, everything was red. His horse spoke in a human voice by God's order and said:

'Alo-Dino, do you know where we are? This is the land of the Red Dev. Tonight we will have to stop at his house and be his guests. He has three heads.'

Alo-Dino reined in before the house of the Red Dev as dusk began to fall and a maiden met him at the gate. She was so sorry for the lad that she said: 'Come in and let me hide you from the Red Dev.'

'Why should you hide me?' said Alo-Dino, entering the monster's house. 'I am not afraid of the Red Dev. Bring me some food! I am starving.'

'Sit down,' said the maiden.

Alo-Dino sat at the monster's table and she brought him three trays stacked high with food.

'You call this supper? I said bring me some food!'

'If you are so hungry you can eat the Red Dev's portion.'

She had cooked about sixty pounds of rice in a big copper cauldron, topped off with two roast oxen. Alo-Dino ate all of it, not bothering to take the bones out of his mouth.

'Oh, I do feel sorry for you,' said the maiden. 'Let me hide you before my husband comes home.'

'That's why I came here, to kill your husband.'

Suddenly the house shook. 'What's that? Why is this room shaking?'

'My husband is coming back,' she said.

The Red Dev arrived, driving bears and wolves and foxes before him. He drove the beasts into the yard, and walked into the house.

'Greetings, Alo-Dino!'

'How do you know I am Alo-Dino?'

'I was in the mountains the day you were born, and the trees, the rocks, the grass—all told me about your birth. And who besides Alo-Dino dares come to my house?' The Red Dev turned to the maiden: 'Wife, hurry up and bring me my supper.'

'This boy ate your portion and left you nothing,' she said.

'That's all right. There is plenty of fresh meat out in the yard.'

They slaughtered a few of the wild beasts, cooked them, and Alo-Dino sat down to eat again with the Red Dev. The monster saw him swallowing the bones too as Alo-Dino gulped down everything he put in his mouth. After they had finished eating the Red Dev said:

'Shall we fight now or tomorrow morning?'

'As you wish.'

'It is our custom to feed a guest first, and fight him later. Tomorrow morning then?'

'I am always ready for a good fight.'

Both were up at daybreak. They seized their weapons and jumped on their horses.

Apples of Immortality

'Who strikes first?' the Red Dev asked.

'I am your guest, so you strike first.'

The Red Dev swung his big mace.

'I want to feel the sting of your lash and I'll jump so high his mace will not hit us and will pass under my belly,' said Alo-Dino's horse.

The Red Dev cast his mace three times, and three times it shot past under the belly of the horse, as Alo-Dino lashed him hard with his whip.

'It's my turn now,' called Alo-Dino. 'Stay where you are!'

He dug in his spurs and went at the monster brandishing his sword. He slashed off the three heads of the Red Dev with a single blow, then he sprang out of the saddle and cut off the monster's ears and lips and tossed them into his saddlebags. He strode back to the house and said to the maiden: 'Greetings, my dear sister-in-law.'

'What do you mean your sister-in-law? I want to be your wife!'

'No. You will wed my eldest brother after I get back.'

'Where are you going?'

'To fetch Hazaran Bulbul.'

'Don't go, my dear. You will lose your head.'

'I can't turn back now. I've got to fetch Hazaran Bulbul no matter what happens.'

Alo-Dino sprang onto his horse and galloped away. He reached a land where everything was white—white earth, white rocks, white trees, white grass. And the Dev's house was also white.

'This,' said the horse, 'is the land of the White Dev. We'll be his guests tonight. The White Dev has seven heads.'

'Good,' said Alo-Dino. 'We'll slash off all seven.'

They paused before the house of the White Dev, and saw that all the doors were shut. Alo-Dino called out in a loud voice: 'Anybody in the house? I want somebody to lead my horse to the stable.'

He saw a maiden open the gate. 'You can tie your horse in the stable,' she said.

Alo-Dino did so, and entered the White Dev's mansion. 'Bring me some food and let me have my supper,' he said.

She brought him six trays stacked high with rice and meat.

'What do you take me for, a child? I said food, food!'

'You are welcome to eat the White Dev's portion if this isn't enough.'

She had cooked about two hundred pounds of rice in a cauldron with twenty handles, topped off with three roast oxen. And Alo-Dino sat at the White Dev's table and finished everything she set before him.

The house began to shake. 'Why is this house shaking like this?'

'The White Dev is coming home. Let me hide you before he gets back.'

'Hide me? What for? I came here to kill the White Dev.'

The monster arrived, driving a whole howling herd of wild beasts before him—lions, bears, wolves, foxes. He left them in the yard and went up to the house.

'Greetings, Alo-Dino!' said the White Dev, shaking his hand.

'How do you know I am Alo-Dino?'

'On the day you were born the mountains, the rocks, the trees and the grass all hailed your birth. "Alo-Dino was born today!" they cried. And you must be Alo-Dino because no one else would dare enter my house.'

The White Dev called to the maiden: 'Wife, bring us our supper.'

'This boy ate your portion and left you nothing,' she said.

'That's all right. We'll butcher the beasts I just brought in. There is always plenty of fresh meat in this house.'

They butchered a few beasts, and Alo-Dino sat down with the White Dev to enjoy another tasty meal. The monster saw him swallowing everything he laid his hands on and not bothering to take the bones out of his mouth. He asked Alo-Dino after they finished eating: 'Shall we fight now, or tomorrow morning?'

They agreed to fight in the morning.

They were up at daybreak. The White Dev swung his mace, and again Alo-Dino lashed his horse so hard that the monster's mace shot past under its belly.

The White Dev called: 'Ha! Where are you, Alo-Dino? Can't see you through all these clouds of dust.'

'Stay where you are! It is now my turn,' Alo-Dino called back.

The White Dev waited for the blow, and his seven heads flew off as Alo-Dino took a whack at him with his mighty sword. Alo-Dino sprang out of the saddle, cut off the ears and lips of the monster, tossed them into his saddlebags, and rode back to the house.

The maiden ran up to him crying: 'Oh, my sweet, how wonderful of you to kill the White Dev! Oh, I want to kiss you for it!'

'No, you can't kiss me. You will wed my middle brother after I get back. I have to go now.'

'Where are you going?'

'To fetch Hazaran Bulbul.'

'You can never do it!'

'We'll see if I can't. Goodbye!'

He rode off, and three days later found himself in the land of another

Apples of Immortality

Dev. 'Alo-Dino,' said the horse, 'as you see, here the earth is all black, the rocks are black, the trees are black, the grass is black—everything is black. This is the land of the forty-headed Black Dev.'

Alo-Dino entered the mansion of the Black Dev and saw about four hundred pounds of rice cooked in a copper cauldron with forty handles, topped off with four roast oxen. His mouth watered, he had not eaten anything for three days. He gobbled up all of this food. And here too, the house began to shake, and the Black Dev came home, driving before him all the wild beasts he had caught in the woods. The monster went up to his house and saw a young fellow sitting there. 'Must be Alo-Dino,' he thought, and gripped his hand.

'Alo-Dino!'

'How do you know my name is Alo-Dino?'

I was out hunting in the mountains when the rocks, the trees, the grass, all hailed your birth. And I know that no one besides Alo-Dino can ever enter my house.' The monster turned to the maiden: 'Wife, bring us our supper.'

'This boy already ate your portion,' she said.

'That's all right, there is plenty of fresh meat in the yard.'

They butchered a few of the wild beasts and cooked another supper. The Black Dev saw how Alo-Dino swallowed the bones too, chewed up everything he thrust into his mouth.

They were up at daybreak to fight, and they fought for three days and three nights. At last Alo-Dino overcame the Black Dev. He cut off the monster's ears and lips, tossed them into his saddlebags, and strode back to the house.

'Oh, I am so glad you killed the Black Dev!' cried the maiden. 'From now on you are mine and I am thine.'

Alo-Dino needed a rest and stayed with her for a week; then he remembered the nightingale, and breathed a deep sigh.

'What are you sighing for? Could you find a better wife than I am?'

'Our orchard has dried up and I have to fetch Hazaran Bulbul. I have to go now. I can't stay here any longer.'

'The owner of Hazaran Bulbul is King Chachonts, who has been asleep for forty days. When he wakes up he can kill twenty heroes like you.'

'I don't care what happens to me. I have to go.'

Alo-Dino leaped into the saddle and galloped off to the great sea. The horse said: 'Alo-Dino, I am not a sea-horse, and I can't swim across.'

Alo-Dino turned the horse loose and stretched out on the seashore to



take a nap. He slept with his head resting on a rock. Heaven only knows whether he was dreaming or not, but he heard a voice calling him: 'Alo-Dino! Look under that rock.'

He woke up and found the bridle of a sea-horse under the rock he used as a pillow. And soon a wild sea-horse sprang out of the waves and would have eaten him up if Alo-Dino had not held onto its mane and thrust the bridle-bit between the horse's teeth. He jumped onto its back.

'Alo-Dino, tell me what you want and I will do my best to help you get it,' said the sea-horse, who found his master in Alo-Dino.

'I want to fetch Hazaran Bulbul.'

'That won't be easy. Hazaran Bulbul is kept in a cage that hangs in the window of a castle built at the very edge of the sea, and the castle belongs to King Chachonts. If I can't leap high enough to reach the cage, and we both fall down into the sea from such a height, we'll be killed, that's sure.'

Alo-Dino lashed the sea-horse so hard that the three hundred and sixty-six veins in the horse's body tingled and its liver burned from the pain. Up sprang the sea-horse in one mighty leap and Alo-Dino flew up to the window of the castle; his arm shot out and he grabbed the cage. Down went the horse, and Alo-Dino landed safely on the other side of the sea.

'You can now dismount and go home,' said the sea-horse.

Alo-Dino let the sea-horse go and mounted his own horse. Holding the cage, he rode back to the land of the Black Dev, and showed the nightingale to the maiden who was to be his own bride.

Apples of Immortality

'My dear Bulbul, speak up so that these black mountains will turn green,' he said to the nightingale.

And the nightingale sang, and the black mountains turned green. The maiden was astonished by the bird's magic power, and so was he. Alo-Dino lived in the monster's house for a month or two. And then one day he told her: 'O my bride, it's time I went back to my own country with you. There is a terrible blight in our kingdom because this bulbul is not singing there.'

They gathered all the treasures of the Black Dev and rode off to the land of the White Dev, which also turned green as the nightingale sang again. The maiden who was to be the bride of the middle brother was eager to go along with them. They took the treasures of the White Dev too, and rode on to the land of the Red Dev. And here they rested for a day or two with the maiden intended for the eldest brother. She joined them, and loading all the treasures of the Red Dev on their horses, they galloped together across the Red land, that turned green by the nightingale of a thousand songs.

Back at the crossroads where the Old Man was still waiting, Alo-Dino said: 'Greetings, pappy.'

'A thousand greetings to you, King's son.'

'Did my two brothers come back?'

'Not yet, King's son.'

'Then I'd better leave these three maidens and Hazaran Bulbul with you and go find my brothers.'

Alo-Dino rode from one city to another looking for his brothers, but there was no sign of them anywhere. At last on the advice of a man in another city he butchered seven oxen and gave a big feast in the churchyard. When the bells started ringing strangers and wayfarers came from all parts of the city to enjoy the free feast prepared for them. Alo-Dino saw his own brothers in the crowd, and as he moved around the tables to see that everybody had plenty to eat he offered his brothers wine and meat. They did not recognize him.

He asked his brothers: 'Where do you work?'

'We stoke the furnace and carry out the ashes in a public bath-house,' they said.

Alo-Dino went to the bath-house with them, and said to the owner: 'Pay them off. They are not going to work here any more. They are my brothers.'

Then turning to his brothers he said: 'I am Alo-Dino, can't you

recognize me? You left our kingdom and came to work in this bath-house clad in those rags?’

At last they recognized him, and told him about their misfortunes.

‘To buy food we had to sell our horses and our clothing,’ they said. ‘And we ended up working in a bath-house.’

Alo-Dino told them how he snatched Hazaran Bulbul from the castle of King Chachonts. He bought his brothers new clothes and horses. Then he rode back to the crossroads with them, where the three maidens and the old man were waiting.

‘This one,’ said Alo-Dino, ‘was the bride of the Red Dev. I have his ears and lips in my saddlebaags.’ He showed them. ‘She will be your wife,’ he said to his eldest brother.

‘And this one was the bride of the White Dev. I killed him too, and I can show you his ears and lips to prove it. She will be your wife,’ he said to his middle brother.

‘And this one was the bride of the Black Dev. She is mine.’

‘He is keeping the prettiest one for himself,’ complained his oldest brother.

They took Hazaran Bulbul, mounted their horses, and started for home with the three brides. Heaven only knows how far they went until they reached a well in the woods.

‘Who will draw some water from this well?’ asked the older brothers. ‘The horses are thirsty, and we are thirsty.’

The middle brother refused to go down into the well, nor would the eldest. They expected Alo-Dino to draw the water.

‘Don’t,’ his bride warned him.

‘My brothers are thirsty,’ he said. ‘The horses are thirsty.’

‘Then take my glove and slipper with you.’

Alo-Dino took her glove and slipper, and was lowered into the well, not suspecting anything. His brothers left him in the well. They took the nightingale and rode home with the three maidens. When they reached their own city they sent a herald ahead to announce their arrival to the king. And the king came out to meet them with his chamberlain and councillors, and escorted them to the palace with great honours.

‘Who are these maidens?’ the king asked his two sons.

‘This one is my bride,’ said the eldest, ‘and this one is my brother’s bride. The girl over there is their maid.’

‘He is lying! I will never wed your eldest son!’ Alo-Dino’s bride protested.

Apples of Immortality

'Well, children, I see there is some disagreement here. Now tell me who brought Hazaran Bulbul?'

The eldest son said: 'I did,' and spoke to the bird: 'Speak up, my dear bulbul, and turn our orchard green.'

The nightingale was silent.

The second brother leapt to his feet and said: 'May the king live long, he didn't bring Hazaran Bulbul, I did.'

'Well, son, make this bird sing then.'

The nightingale remained silent.

And now let us turn to the youngest brother.

Alo-Dino couldn't get out of the well, and heaven only knows how long he stayed in it until a merchant came along with his caravan and heard his cries for help. It took fifteen men to get him out of the well.

'Who are you?' the merchant asked him.

'I am a traveller. I fell into this well on a very dark night, when I couldn't see a thing.'

'Where are you going?'

'I am going back to my city.'

Alo-Dino spent the night with this caravan as the merchant's guest and had supper with him. The caravan started off the next morning and Alo-Dino went on to the city with the merchant.

Here, in his own city, Alo Dino found work in the bazaar as an apprentice to a tailor, who had no idea who the boy was. Alo-Dino swept and cleaned the shop, carried water from the public fountain and worked hard. He made himself useful to his master, who took him for a bright, dependable lad and was glad to have him as an apprentice.

The next day the King's chamberlain and councillors came to the bazaar and went to all the tailor shops showing a woman's glove and wanting one to match it. They entered the shop where Alo-Dino sat in a corner and asked his master: 'Can you make a glove to match this?' The tailor took one look at the glove and said, 'Sorry, I can't.'

Alo-Dino sprang to his feet and said: 'Master, take the king's order! I can make a glove just like it.'

The master was annoyed. 'You came here only yesterday as an apprentice and you think you can make a glove just like this when I say I can't.'

'Why don't you let him try it?' said the chamberlain. 'If he can't, we will strike off his head tomorrow.'

Alo-Dino and the Nightingale of a Thousand Songs, Hazaran Bulbul

Alo-Dino was not worried. 'Master, bring me five sacks of nuts and I will make that glove.'

The tailor went out and brought him four sacks of nuts. 'Four sacks is plenty,' he said. 'I didn't have enough money on me to buy five sacks.'

'Well, master, you go home now and let me stay in the shop. The glove will be ready tomorrow morning.'

And the next morning the glove was ready. The tailor came back to his shop and found a pair of gloves on the counter that matched perfectly. And the chamberlain and the councillors were just as astonished as the tailor.

The master received his reward and was happy, but his apprentice quit. 'I asked for five sacks of nuts and you gave me only four sacks,' he said. 'I don't care to work for a miser.'

Alo-Dino next became an apprentice to a shoemaker. The king's chamberlain and the councillors went from one shoe-shop to another with a woman's slipper, but no shoemaker could match it. Alo-Dino's new master said he could not. Alo-Dino said he could, and his master got the order.

'If we don't have the slipper you lose your heads,' the chamberlain warned them.

'Master, bring me twenty sacks of nuts and I will make that slipper tonight.'

The shoemaker brought him only nineteen sacks of nuts.

'Well, you go home now,' said Alo-Dino. 'The slipper will be ready tomorrow morning.'

The shoemaker watched his apprentice from the roof of the shop and saw him cracking and eating nuts. 'How did I run into this fool?' he said to himself. 'I'll lose my head in the morning.' He was jittery all night.

But the next morning a pair of slippers that matched perfectly were ready for the king's men. The shoemaker received his reward, and Alo-Dino quit.

'I asked for twenty sacks of nuts, and you gave me only nineteen sacks. I don't care to work for a miser.'

Alo-Dino wandered around in the bazaar and saw a lot of troops. 'Whose warriors are these?' he asked.

'King Chachonts is looking for the man who stole Hazaran Bulbul, and if our King does not find the thief and hand him over, King Chachonts will smash the king's throne,' people told him.

Alo-Dino saw his eldest brother dismount before the red tent of King Chachonts and bow seven times before the king.

Apples of Immortality

'I was the one who took Hazaran Bulbul,' Alo-Dino heard his eldest brother say to the king.

'How? Where did you find my bulbul?'

'In your woods.'

'No, no, go away! Don't waste my time.'

The middle brother rode out to the red tent, very proud on his horse, dismounted, bowed seven times and stood before King Chachonts with hands folded on his breast. Alo-Dino heard him tell how he caught the nightingale. 'It was a dark night when all of a sudden I saw the bulbul flying off to its nest. I reached up and—'

'No, no, you are lying!' said King Chachonts, and ordered him out of his tent.

'I will lay waste this whole land if the thief is not found and delivered to me!' King Chachonts threatened.

Alo-Dino went up to the red tent and bowed.

'You stole my Hazaran Bulbul?'

'Yes, my king.'

'How? Tell me.'

'I rode out to the land of the Red Dev, who had three heads, and killed him. Then I rode to the land of the White Dev with seven heads, and killed him too. I kept going and reached the land of the Black Dev with forty heads, and killed the Black Dev also. Then riding a sea-horse whose bridle I found under a rock, I crossed over to the other side of the sea and saw the cage hanging in a window of your castle. The sea-horse leapt so high in the air that I could reach the window. I took the cage with Hazaran Bulbul in it.'

'Are you Alo-Dino?'

'I am Alo-Dino.'

'How can you prove what you said?'

The lad opened his saddlebags and showed King Chachonts the ears and lips of the three monsters he slew.

This convinced the king. 'Son, you can keep Hazaran Bulbul as a gift from me.' And King Chachonts withdrew with his troops.

The youth who snatched Hazaran Bulbul was summoned to the palace. The old king wanted to meet him.

'I am your son Alo-Dino, can't you recognize me, father?'

The king wasn't sure. 'If you are really my son, Hazaran Bulbul will prove it.'

'Speak, my dear Bulbul,' Alo-Dino said to the bird of a thousand songs.

Alo-Dino and the Nightingale of a Thousand Songs, Hazaran Bulbul

And the nightingale burst into a song that turned the king's orchard green.

His two older sons confessed.

Alo-Dino said to his father: 'My brothers did not kill me, and I don't want to be the cause of their death. Let both marry their brides, and banish them from your kingdom, never to return as long as I live.'

The king died two years later, and Alo-Dino, now happily married to his own bride, sat on the throne as the new king.

They attained their wish, and may we likewise attain our wishes.

BROTHER-LAMB

Once upon a time there lived a man and his second wife, and they had a girl named Mariam and a little boy named Manouk by his former wife. Their stepmother did not want them in the house and urged her husband to get rid of them.

One day in the fall the man prepared his seed grain, to sow it the next morning. This heartless woman got up in the middle of the night while her husband was asleep and roasted the grain in the oven. Then she put the grain back in the sack, confident it would not grow when her husband planted it, and went back to bed.

Early the next morning the man put the sack of seed grain in his cart and went to sow his field, not knowing what a devilish thing his wife had done.

A month passed, then two months; all the fields in the village turned green, and only his own field was barren.

'O wife, what shall we do?' he said. 'The wheat planted by our neighbours is coming up fast and is already that high, but our field remains barren. I can't figure it out.'

'I know what you can do about it,' said the wife, 'and if you follow my advice you can have a good crop of wheat like our neighbours. But if you don't we'll have to go without bread. I want you to take your children and slaughter them, one on this side of the field, the other on the other side, and you will see how fast our field will turn green.'

'O you Godless woman, you want me to slaughter my own children? What do I care for such wheat? To hell with it. How could you think of such a thing?'

'Well, you know best, it's up to you. You can do what you like. Whether you slaughter your children or not is all the same to me. What do I care if you go hungry?'

She kept nagging her husband about his children and the poor man

Brother-Lamb

did not know what to do. To kill them was unthinkable. He would rather starve to death with his children. But his wife was at it day and night, and in the end he decided to abandon his children somewhere on the rocky plains and be done with it. He thought that would be better than killing them outright.

One day he took Mariam and Manouk to the rocky plains far from the village and said: 'Wait for me here, my dears, I'll soon be back.'

He went home by another road. The children waited and waited for their father to come back, but there was no sign of him. Nor did they see anyone else in this wilderness. Mariam was older than the boy, and she suspected why their father abandoned them here and disappeared. She took her little brother by the hand and started walking along a path, not knowing where it would lead them.

They walked on for two days, without food and water. The girl was old enough not to complain, but the little boy cried for water.

He saw water in a cow's hoofprint, and said: 'Sister, may I drink this water? I am dying of thirst.'

'No, no, don't you dare drink that water, you will turn into a calf! Be patient for a little longer, and we are sure to come to a spring, and then you can drink all you want.'

But no spring was in sight. They walked on, the boy dragging his feet. Then he saw water in a camel's footprint. But again, his sister would not let him drink from it.

'You will turn into a little camel,' she said.

Some time later the little boy saw a horse's footprint filled with water, and his sister warned him once again not to drink from it.

'You will turn into a colt,' she said.

At last the boy could wait no longer. He fell behind his sister, too weak to walk, and she did not see him suck with his parched lips the water left in a sheep's footprint. When Mariam looked back, she saw a pretty little white lamb running after her. She burst into tears, but it was too late now to do anything about it. Her brother had changed into a lamb.

Heaven only knows how much farther they had to go until at last they reached a spring by the wayside, shaded by a big plane tree. Here they had their fill of the cool refreshing water, and Mariam climbed to the top of the tree to rest, while her brother-lamb grazed in the shade below.

At sundown the king's men came to this spring to water their horses,

Apples of Immortality

but the horses shied away from the pool when they saw the maiden's image reflected in it. The king's men were puzzled and looked up in the tree and saw its branches shimmering with the wondrous beauty of a maiden.

'Who are you, peri or a mortal?' they called. 'Come down!'

The girl stayed in the tree, afraid to talk.

The men went to the king and said: 'May the king live long, we saw



a sun-bright angel in the plane tree by the pool and a white lamb grazing under it. But she won't come down from the tree, and she won't say a word.'

The king ordered his men to bring the maiden before him. They rode back to the spring and asked her again to come down from the tree, but she would not.

'The devil take her, she is stubborn!' they said. 'If she won't come herself we'll at least take the lamb to our king.'

When the girl saw them taking her lamb away from her she climbed down the tree, and the men were dazzled by her looks: a peri-like maiden glowing like a jewel in the sun. They grabbed her also and took both to the king.

The king asked the girl: 'Who are you? And what are you doing here all alone?'

She told the king her story. Well, the king was still single, and he made her his wife. The wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights.

An old servant woman in the palace waited on the king's wife. And

Brother-Lamb

some months after the wedding, when the young queen was with child, this woman asked for permission to take her to the beach.

'It will do her a world of good to have a good sea bath,' the old woman said.

The king gave his consent, and the lamb went to the beach with his sister.

The old hag helped the queen undress—and suddenly she pushed her into the sea. Instantly a big white fish swallowed her.

The lamb ran up and down the shore with pitiful cries, and the old hag ran after him but could not catch him. She picked up the young queen's clothes and hastened to her own house, where she had her own ugly daughter wear them. The hideous girl, disguised as the young queen, went to the palace with her mother.

'May the king live long,' said the old hag, 'I gave my queen a good sea bath and brought her back.'

The king did not know that the veiled girl in the queen's clothes was not his own wife. A day or two later she pretended to be ill, and went to bed. 'I was chilled at the beach and I don't feel well,' she said. She kept moaning in bed, as though in deep pain, and would not touch her food.

'Tell me what you'd like to eat and my cooks will prepare it for you,' said the king.

'Oh, I don't have the heart to tell you,' she said.

'You know, my dear, I would do anything for you. Why, I would gladly give half of my kingdom to make you well!'

'Maybe I could eat a little lamb,' she said. 'A few bites of the meat of our own lamb. I don't care for anything else.'

The king drew back in horror. 'But you told me the lamb is your own brother! Do you want me to butcher your own brother? I thought this lamb was dearer to you than the sight of your own eyes.'

'What can I do, my king? One's own life is even more precious than a brother's life. I hope my life means more to you than a lamb's.'

The king came out of the queen's chamber frowning. His conscience would not let him butcher such a pretty white lamb, and one, moreover, that was his wife's brother. But his wife would eat nothing else, and she had to eat to get well. Deeply perplexed, the king ordered that the lamb be seized and butchered.

The lamb was still at the seashore crying for his sister, and by God's order he talked with her in a human voice:

Apples of Immortality

'Mariam my sister, they are whetting the knife
And will take my life by the king's order.
The king does not know she is not his wife
And just playing sick. They have lit the fire
To boil the water and butcher your brother.'

And his sister called back from the depths of the sea :

'O what can I do, Manouk, brother dear
The old witch fooled me, the fish swallowed me
I am helpless here deep down in the sea
With the king's baby sleeping inside me.'

That night the sexton of the church happened to be walking along
the beach and heard a woman's voice calling him :

'Hear me, O sexton, for the love of God !
Go tell the good king not to whet the knife
And boil the water to please his false wife,
Not to slay the lamb, my own little brother.'

When the sexton heard it for the third time he ran to the palace.
'May the king live long, I heard a woman's voice calling me from the
sea and saying, three times :

"Hear me, O sexton, for the love of God !
Go tell the good king not to whet the knife
And boil the water to please his false wife,
Not to slay the lamb, my own little brother."

'I don't know what to make of it, my king. I was stunned !'
'Thank you, sexton. Tonight I shall go to the seashore with you and
perhaps you will hear that voice again.'
And true enough, the king too heard his wife's voice :

'Hear me, O sexton, for the love of God !
Go tell the good king not to whet the knife
And boil the water to please his false wife,
Not to slay the lamb, my own little brother.'

The next morning the king ordered all the fishermen in the city to
gather at the seashore and cast their nets. They caught the big white fish,
and when they cut the belly of the fish open, they found the beautiful
young queen in it, soaked in sweat, hugging her newborn baby.

The lamb recognized his sister and leaping with joy ran to the young

Brother-Lamb

queen. And as the queen and her brother embraced, the lamb changed back into a boy.

They dressed the queen in royal garments, and the happy king took his wife and new-born baby and his wife's brother back to the palace. As for the old hag and her daughter, they were tied to the tails of wild mules by the king's order and dragged up and down the rocky hills and through the woods until their lifeless bodies were torn to shreds.

TALE OF A BOY'S DREAM

One day a long time ago a king summoned his goldsmith and ordered two rings, to be delivered in a week. 'Master, you can make the rings with these ten gold pieces and two precious stones,' he said, and dismissed him from his presence.

The jeweller went back to his shop and asked his apprentice to keep an eye on the gold coins and precious stones until he got back from lunch and started working on the king's order. And as soon as his master was out of the shop the boy's head sank down on the work bench and he fell asleep. Now it so happened that the king passed by this same shop with his chamberlain and councillors to see what went on in the bazaar, if everything was in order, and caught sight of the apprentice napping at his work, with the gold coins and precious stones the king gave his master scattered on the bench before him. The king went in on tip-toe and slapped the boy for sleeping at his job, and ran out of the shop before the apprentice woke up.

The young fellow opened his eyes, looked around, and saw no one in the shop. 'Ah, you Godless one,' he sighed, 'I was having a most wonderful dream and you spoiled it all. You didn't let me finish my dream and attain my wish. May you never attain *your* wish!'

The king heard these words of the apprentice, but said nothing, and after he went back to the palace he sent for the boy.

'Are you sure the king wants to see my apprentice and not me?' the master asked the king's men. 'What does the king have to do with my apprentice anyway?'

They told him their orders were to take only his apprentice to the palace.

The boy did not know what the king called him for and expected the worst. He bowed low seven times and remained standing before the king with hands folded on his breast.

Tale of a Boy's Dream

'Tell me, my boy, what you dreamt in the shop, and I will help you attain your wish.'

'May the king live long, I can never tell you my dream until it comes true.'

'You will be sorry if you don't.'

'May the king live long, you can kill me if you like, but that's how I feel about my dream.'

The king commanded his men to throw the apprentice into the dungeon, thinking it would scare the life out of him, and the boy spent a miserable night in the dark vault. But the next day he still refused to tell his dream, and was beaten by the king's men and dragged back to jail.

He was left there without food and water for a whole week, and he wondered how he could get out of it. He picked up a stick he saw lying on the damp floor of the dungeon and began to dig with it. He dug and dug until he made a hole large enough for him to slip through. As he crept out through the hole he found himself standing beneath the window of a chamber in the palace. He took off his belt, fastened one end of it to the window, and climbed into a gorgeously furnished room, where he saw a maiden as fair as a peri sleeping in a silken bed. In a corner of the room there was a gold tray with roast goose and pilav on it. He was so famished he fell on the food and cleaned up the tray. He wiped his mouth, kissed the sleeping maiden on both cheeks, and climbed out of the window. He slid down his belt and crawled back to the dungeon.

Well, who do you think the maiden was? The king's daughter. She woke up and saw that somebody had eaten her roast goose and pilav. She stood before the mirror and saw the marks on her cheeks. So somebody had also kissed her during her sleep! 'How did he get in?' she wondered. 'And who is he?' She searched through all her rooms, but found no one hiding in them.

The next day the bold youth climbed in through her window again and helped himself to more roast goose and pilav. And again he kissed her on both cheeks, and as he turned to go, she held him by the tail of his coat.

'How dare you? If I told my father he would chop off your head!'

'May the king's daughter live long, you do not have to tell your father, you can kill me right now by your own hand and be done with it. I love you so very much that I am ready to die for you.'

This answer pleased the princess. 'Well, of course, if you love me so much then I am thine and you are mine,' she said.

Apples of Immortality

The apprentice sat down and ate and drank with the king's daughter, and they had a merry time together. At midnight, he crawled back to his underground jail.

This went on for a month, two months, three months, and the happy youth was her guest every night.

Then one day the king wanted to know whether the boy in the dungeon was dead or alive, and was astonished to see him looking so well.

'Are you going to tell me your dream?'

'May the king live long, I will not tell you my dream even if you keep me in the dungeon three years.'

'I pity you, my lad. You will be sorry.'

'I will never be sorry.'

Stubborn as ever.

'Take him back and let him starve to death.'

The king's men gave him another beating and tossed the boy back into the dungeon. And this was what the boy wanted. He continued to eat and drink with the king's daughter, and kissed her every night.

This went on for quite some time. And then one day ambassadors of the King of Franks arrived and brought three horses with them and this message: 'If you do not tell me how old these horses are I will come with my army and wipe out your kingdom.'

The poor king knew he was no match for the King of Franks, who was always looking for an excuse to attack him. 'If anyone can tell their ages it's my daughter,' he said. 'My daughter is the cleverest person I know.'

But his daughter would not help him this time, and advised him to ask somebody else. She wanted her young friend to give the right answer and thus regain his freedom. That night she told the apprentice how to tell the ages of the three horses sent by the King of Franks by watching them eat the barley in their mangers.

The next day the king summoned his court, and his chamberlain and councillors were just as puzzled as was the king himself by this odd request of the King of Franks. Then all of a sudden the king thought of the apprentice in the dungeon. Perhaps that boy could tell how old the horses were. And the king ordered the apprentice to appear before him.

The lad came in and bowed low seven times.

'I want to ask you a question,' the king said, and if you can give me the right answer, you can have anything you want. Can you tell me the ages of these three horses?'

'Of course I can.'

Tale of a Boy's Dream

The boy fed the horses barley, and watched them eat. The first horse ate all the grain in the manger. The second horse ate only a part of it. The third horse was too frisky and restless to eat any of it. And so he said:

'This horse is three years old, this one is two years old, and this one is a year old.'

The ambassadors, the king, and his courtiers all were amazed by the boy's wise answer. In his joy the king wanted to set the apprentice free and give him anything he wanted, but suddenly he remembered the lad's stubborn refusal to tell his dream, and the king asked the same question again, and got the same answer. The ambassadors returned to Frankistan with many costly gifts, and the boy stayed in the dungeon.

Three months later the ambassadors came back, with three apples from the King of Franks, and another threatening letter: 'I will destroy your kingdom, and you and your family will be carried off as my slaves, if you do not tell me how old these three apples are.'

The apples were of the same variety, size, colour, shape, odour. And again, the king's daughter pretended not to know the answer. But that night she told it to the apprentice when he climbed into her chamber. The king had no one to turn to but the boy he kept in jail, and the next day the lad came through with the right answer. The apprentice dropped the apples one by one into a pool, and watched them. The apple that sank to the bottom of the pool and then came to the surface was one year old, he said. The apple that went down half way before bobbing up to the surface was two years old. And the apple that did not sink at all was three years old, he said.

The ambassadors nodded. The king was mighty pleased.

'Look here, my boy, you just tell me your dream and you will be free. You are young. I want you to go and enjoy life.'

'May the king live long, why bring that up again? You know I will never tell you my dream until it comes true.'

'Then you must stay in the dungeon until you come to your senses!'

The ambassadors returned to Frankistan, and the king thought his troubles were over when he did not see them for a year. But how he shuddered when they came back with twelve young children and this new message from the King of Franks: 'You are done for if you cannot tell me which is a boy and which is a girl among these children.'

The poor king was at the end of his wits. The children looked exactly alike, and it was impossible to tell them apart. The king racked his brains, and asked his daughter, but once again the princess pretended not to know the answer. As for his chamberlain and councillors, they were of

Apples of Immortality

no use to him in this matter. In his despair, the king turned to the boy in the dungeon, and the youth said: 'I will tell you, my king, but this time—may the king live long!—I have a request of my own to make. Will you grant it?'

'Even if you asked for my whole kingdom I would give it to you, my lad. Just save me from the King of Franks!'

'May the king live long, I have heard you have a lovely, peri-like daughter. Would you give her to me as wife, if the ambassadors are satisfied with my answer?'

'I would! My daughter would be lawfully yours.'

'Is that a promise?'

'It is a promise.'

'I will give you my answer tomorrow morning.'

That night the king's daughter explained to the apprentice how to tell the boys from the girls. And the next morning the lad met the twelve children in the hall where they came to wash before breakfast, and he himself poured the water for them. ['It's too hot!' the boys cried, and withdrew their hands. But the girls did not complain about the water being too hot. He put them in separate rooms: six boys, six girls.]

And he proved to be right again. 'Bravo!' cried the ambassadors, and returned to Frankistan. The apprentice married the king's daughter amid great rejoicing, and the wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights.

Upon their return to their own country the ambassadors told the King of Franks about the goldsmith's apprentice.

'If he is so clever then why didn't you bring him with you?' the king said. 'Go back and tell that boy I desire to meet him.'

The ambassadors came back, but now all they wanted from the king was to let them take the apprentice to Frankistan.

The boy was worried. 'If the King of Franks asks me a question and I can't answer it I shall lose my head,' he thought to himself. 'And if I don't go, he will make war on my father-in-law. I'd better go.'

He left for Frankistan with the king's consent. It was a long way to Frankistan and it took him a month to reach there with the ambassadors. The great King of Franks sized him up from head to foot as the boy bowed low before him. Said the King of Franks:

'If you are as clever as my ambassadors tell me you are, then take this piece of steel and make me a fine velvet suit out of it. If you do it in three



days, my daughter is yours, with a large dowry. But if you can't, let me warn you your head will roll in the dust.'

The poor fellow was nearly frightened to death. He had no other choice but to take the piece of steel, and bow out of the king's presence. He happened to pass under the window of the king's daughter, who leaned out and spoke to him.

What a beauty! The fairest maiden he ever saw. He was dazzled by her looks.

'You seem worried. What for?' she asked.

'Well, your father gave me this piece of steel and wants me to make a velvet suit out of it. I know I shall lose my head.'

'Oh, that's nothing to worry about. Do what I tell you and no harm will come to you. Fill your handkerchief with sand, go back to my father, and say: "May the king live long, have this sand spun to velvet thread for the suit of clothes you ordered." And when my father says, "How can one spin sand?" you tell him, "How can I sew a velvet suit out of a piece of steel?"'

The youth was relieved. He did as the princess told him, and with his handkerchief full of sand hurried back to the palace and bowed low before her father.

'Well, my lad, is there anything you want to ask me?'

'May the king live long, here is the sand for the velvet suit you ordered. I will have it ready for you in three days after you have this sand spun to thread.'

Apples of Immortality

The King of Franks froze on his throne. He was too stunned to say a word. There was a long silence.

He spoke at last: 'How can anyone spin sand?'

'If no one can spin sand then how do you expect me to sew a velvet suit out of steel?'

'You win, my lad. My daughter is lawfully yours.'

The young couple kissed the king's hand, kissed the queen on her breast, and bade them farewell. They departed with loads and loads of costly gifts, and after a month's journey, the youth was back in his own land with his second bride. They were met by the king and his chamberlain and councillors, and a large body of troops, who escorted the couple to the palace with royal honours. The youth sat down and had a long friendly chat with his father-in-law, telling him about his adventures in Frankistan. They smiled, they laughed, they joked, and got on very well.

'May the king live long,' said the youth, 'now at last I will tell you my dream.'

'I am dying to hear it.'

'I dreamt I was in a beautiful rose garden and two maidens as fair as peris came and sat on my knees. One was your own daughter, and the other the daughter of the King of Franks. I had a dazzling beauty sitting on each knee, and being young and ardent, I put my arm around the daughter of the King of Franks, and drew her toward me, and kissed her on both cheeks. Then I turned around to kiss your daughter, when wham! you slapped me in the face, and you woke me up before I attained my wish. That's why I cried out in my anger: "May you never attain your wish!" not knowing it was you. And that's why I didn't want to tell you my dream until it came true.'

The king stepped down from the throne and let his son-in-law rule in his stead.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.



TALE OF THE WIZARD

Once upon a time there was a man who had three daughters, all three ripe for marriage. One day this man got up to go to town and asked his daughters: 'What would you like me to bring you from town?'

'I'd like to have a nightgown and a pair of slippers,' said the eldest daughter.

'Bring me a handkerchief and a head-veil,' said the middle daughter.

'Father, I want nothing,' said the youngest daughter, 'but if you wish to bring me something I'd like to have a blouse of pearls.'

'A blouse of pearls? Where can I find one?' said the father.

'That's all I want. Don't bother to bring me anything else.'

The man went to town, bought the nightgown, the slippers, the handkerchief and the head-veil, but couldn't find a blouse of pearls anywhere in the bazaar.

'You have been going around all day, man, what are you looking for?' somebody asked him in the bazaar.

'What can I do, brother? I have three grown-up daughters, and I bought two of them what they wanted, but I can't find a blouse of pearls for my youngest daughter. And that's what she wants.'

'I'll give you a blouse of pearls,' said the man, 'but on one condition only. On the day you cook sour cabbage soup in your house your daughter who wears my blouse belongs to me and I'll come to your house and take her away from you.'

The girl's father thought: 'I'll take this blouse and go home. I can tell my wife not to cook sour cabbage soup. It's nothing to worry about.'

He went home and gave each of his daughters what they had asked for, and he said to his wife: 'Don't you ever again cook sour cabbage soup in this house.'

'Why not, husband?'

'The man who gave me this priceless pearl blouse said that on the day

Apples of Immortality

we cook sour cabbage soup he will come to our house and take away our daughter who wears it.'

The mother warned her daughters not to cook sour cabbage soup even during Lent.

One day a long time afterwards the mother was doing the family washing and said to her eldest daughter: 'We have to fast this week, so why don't you cook something without any meat or fat in it?'

The girl forgot her parents' warning and started cooking sour cabbage soup. And the man who gave the blouse of pearls came to press his claim.

'I am a man of my word,' sighed the father, and gave him his eldest daughter.

The man took the eldest daughter to his castle. Nobody seemed to be living in it. 'My goodness, am I going to live here all by myself?' the girl wondered.

He led her to a chamber upstairs. She counted thirty-nine chambers. They had supper and slept in the fortieth.

Early the next morning this man brought the girl forty litres of cotton and said: 'I'll be gone for forty days. You must spin all of this cotton by the time I get back, and if you don't, well, do you see this big iron skewer? I'll ram it down your throat and hang you from the ceiling.'

The girl was nearly frightened to death. She knew she could not spin forty litres of cotton in forty days. Her captor came back, drove the skewer down her throat, and hanged her from the ceiling. Then he went back to her father and said: 'You gave me the wrong girl.'

The father handed over his second daughter. And the man took her to his castle, and told her he would be gone for forty days, and she must spin forty litres of cotton before he got back. She could not spin forty litres of cotton and he hanged her also from the ceiling, next to her sister.

And again the man went back to her father and said: 'Look here, my friend, you gave me two of your daughters but you didn't give me your youngest, and that's the girl you know I should have.'

The youngest daughter dressed up and went to the man's castle with him. And he ordered her also to spin forty litres of cotton in forty days. 'Do you see your sisters hanging from the ceiling? You'll be hanging beside them if you disobey my order,' he warned her.

The girl worked day and night. 'There is no end to this,' she thought. Then one day she heard from her chamber the king's heralds crying in all parts of the city: 'Whoever cures the king's son will get a big reward for it.' She mustered courage to leave the castle and go to the king's palace.

Tale of the Wizard

She stood before the ailing prince, who had an abcess in his throat. She made faces, she clowning, she moved her arms as though spinning cotton, and made him laugh. And as the king's son laughed the abcess in his throat burst, and he got well.

'How can I reward you for curing my son?' said his joyous father.

'I have to spin forty litres of cotton,' she said, 'and I know I can't do it alone. If you'll have all of this cotton spun for me I wouldn't want anything else for a reward.'

The king ordered the cotton to be distributed among his subjects and to be spun in one day, which was done. When the forty days were over and the man came back to his castle he saw that all of the cotton was spun.

'Now I know you are the girl I should have had in the first place,' he said.

They sat down to eat; then went to bed. And early the next morning her captor said: 'I've got to go away again. Here are the keys to my castle. Keep them with you until I get back.'

He pulled out two of her teeth, one upper, one lower, and replaced them with silver teeth.

After the man was gone, she opened one door after another with the keys he gave her, curious to know what was in them. She found one chamber full of silver, another chamber full of gold, a third packed with diamonds. There was no limit to the man's wealth. She saw a fountain in one chamber and when she held her finger in the water her finger turned to gold. She washed her hair, and her hair turned to gold. She opened another door and walked in to find skilled craftsmen busy with their various tasks: goldsmiths, weavers, carpenters.

'Boys, what are you doing here?' she asked them.

'We are at the mercy of a lawless man, a wizard, and must work for him,' they said. 'He sells what we make.'

'If I let you out of this castle and set you free, will you make me a waterproof chest that can be opened only from the inside?'

'We will,' they said.

'After I lock myself in the chest, throw it into the sea.'

She was planning her escape, and hoped the wizard would never find her. The chest was ready the next day. She stocked it with food and got in.

'Boys, here are the keys for every chamber in this castle. You are now free to do what you like. I'll lock the chest from the inside.'

The chest was thrown into the sea. And the captive craftsmen took all the treasure from the castle and levelled the building to the ground before they made their escape.

Apples of Immortality

The chest was washed ashore in another kingdom far from the castle. The king's son was strolling along the beach with his councillors when he saw the chest floating on the waves, and he had a strong swimmer haul it out of the water.

They tried hard but could not open the chest. The girl unlocked it from the inside, and when the king's son saw a beautiful girl come out of it he went wild over her.

The councillors congratulated the king for his son's find. When the king saw the girl he said: 'She is very pretty indeed.'

'Father,' said the happy prince, 'even if another maiden dropped from heaven like a bundle of light I wouldn't want her. This is the only girl for me.'

Their wedding was celebrated for seven days and seven nights.

The wizard came back to his castle and saw nothing but a heap of ruins. The girl and the craftsmen were gone, and he saw that he had lost everything he owned. 'Well, you did get away, and you gave them my keys, but I'll have you back in my clutches,' he said.

The wizard went from village to village and from town to town entertaining the crowds as an acrobat, and everywhere he went he looked for her; his eyes always scanned the faces of the women. At last the wizard went to the city where the girl was now the wife of the king's son. And here he tied his rope before the palace gate and amused the crowds with his clowning and feats of skill. The king's son watched him and laughed.

'Come on out and see this acrobat, he is really very funny,' the young prince said to his wife.

'Oh, I've seen too many acrobats,' she said.

The prince urged her not to miss this one, and she watched his antics from the balcony. She could not help laughing, and as she opened her mouth, the wizard recognized her by her gleaming silver teeth. He took his rope and went away. And as night fell, the wizard wrote out something on a piece of paper and threw it over the roof of the church. The whole city was plunged into darkness. The dogs stopped barking. The cocks stopped crowing. And not a single man or woman was awake in the city except the wizard himself and the princess whom at last he had back in his clutches.]

'How are you going to get away from me this time?' he said.

She tried to wake up her husband. She shook him and pinched him hard, but the king's son would not wake up. She was desperate and didn't know what to do.

Tale of the Wizard

'This is your last day on earth,' said the wizard. 'Bring me a copper cauldron.'

She brought him a copper cauldron.

'Light the fireplace and heat a copperful of water. I will boil you alive in it.'

'You have me back in your power and you can do with me what you like,' she said helplessly. 'But let me go out for a moment and say my last prayers. I'll be back.'

'I'll let you go out to say your last prayers, but remember, you can't escape me this time.'

She ran up to the roof of the palace and saw that the whole city was dark and only a dim light glimmered in the distance. She hurried out of the palace and ran toward that light as fast as she could. When she reached the light she found herself in the house of a horrid old woman who had her right breast thrown over her left shoulder and her left breast thrown over her right shoulder, and was chewing a chunk of lead as she kneaded the dough for her bread. An ogress! In her despair the girl seized the ogress's breasts and sucked them as if she were an infant, and as she did that the ogress became friendly.

'No bird on the wing dares fly over my house, no snake on its belly dares crawl into it, and you, a mortal, dare come to my house?'

'Nanny, God above and you on earth: I have no one else to turn to for help. I just ran away from a wizard after he threatened to boil me alive in a copperful of water. Save me!'

'Is he still around? He is my brother. What will you give me if I save you from that evil-doer?'

'Anything you want!'

'You must promise to give me your unborn child.'

'I promise. Just save me from the wizard.'

'You must climb to the roof of the church and find that magic paper my brother wrote and tear it up. Then you will be safe.'

The girl ran to the church and climbed to the roof. She groped in the dark for the magic writing, and found it. She climbed down the roof, and tore up the paper. The lights went on, the sleepers opened their eyes, the dogs barked, the cocks crowed. She ran back to the palace and saw that her husband was awake now, and the wizard had disappeared.

'Wife, what happened?' the king's son asked her, yawning.

'The acrobat you saw yesterday was going to boil me alive in a cauldron of water! I tried to wake you up. He put everybody in the whole town to sleep. He is a wizard, a dev. He threw a piece of magic writing on the

Apples of Immortality

roof of the church and the lights went out in the city, and the dogs stopped barking. It was going to be my last day on earth, but I ran away from him. I met his sister, an ogress, and she told me about the magic writing. I found it and tore it up. The wizard fled when the lights went



on in the city and the dogs barked again and the cocks crowed.'

The king's son ordered that all the city gates be closed, and the wizard was caught and boiled alive in the same cauldron of water, and that was the end of that dev.

About a year later the princess gave birth to a beautiful son, and when the boy became two years old she took him to the ogress who saved her life. 'Here is my child,' she said. 'I have kept my promise.'

'You kept your promise, and so I am giving your child back to you,' said the ogress.

The father and mother of the princess moved to the palace and lived happily with their youngest daughter to the end of their days.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

FAITHFUL WIFE

There was once a man in Erevan who had a very pretty wife, and was out of work.

'Wife, I have to go to some other country to find work,' he said.

'I don't know what to say, you know best. Our children will starve to death if you remain idle like this.'

The man asked his younger brother to move into his house so that his family would be protected while he was gone. He thought he could trust his brother. He took enough food with him to last him a few months, and travelled from village to village, from city to city, working a few days here, a few days there, always on the go, and leading a stranger's life with all its hardships. Meanwhile his brother lived in comfort back home. His wife washed the fellow's feet every day, washed his hair, cleaned his clothes, even gave him spending money so that he wouldn't steal and get into trouble. She slaved for his brother like a servant. She paid no attention to his advances and remained a faithful wife.

A year went by, then two years, three years, and at last her husband wrote her he was on his way home with all his savings. On the day they expected him back his brother went out to meet him. They embraced and kissed each other at the edge of the town. 'How are my wife and children?' was the first question the man asked.

'Your wife!' his brother said with a smirk.

'What do you mean? What happened?'

'She is shameless. How could you marry such a slut? You will find out soon enough.'

His wife had made great preparations and was overjoyed to see him back, but the man avoided her. She washed her husband's feet, changed his clothes, attended to his comfort, but the man scarcely spoke a word to her and ate in silence. While they were having their meal urchins came and threw rocks and bottles at the house, calling the woman bad names. The young brother went out, cursed the boys and chased them away—

Apples of Immortality

but they stoned the house by his own orders. It was all arranged by him. 'I told you,' he said to his brother.

Her husband's silence and indifference worried the woman, but she couldn't get anything out of him. 'Maybe he came back with an empty purse after all the years he spent in those strange far-away places,' she thought. 'Or he suffered some mishaps he doesn't want to talk about.'

For the next few days her husband sat in a corner of the house, silent, scowling, withdrawn. Then he took his wife to the woods, and killed her in cold blood. He left his wife's body unburied, to be devoured by dogs and wolves.

A spring of immortality gushed out of her mouth by God's order.

A merchant from Ispahan happened to pass through this country with his caravan and camped here for the night. He was surprised to see the spring. 'I have been travelling through this country for forty years and I never saw this spring before,' he said. While his men were pitching the tents they found the woman's lifeless body lying by the spring. 'She must have been unfaithful to her husband,' the merchant said.

They built a fire to cook their supper, and it so happened that they had nothing but salted lake-trout to eat. As they boiled the trout in water drawn from this spring live fishes leaped out of the kettle. They were wonderstruck. What miracle was this? The water of the spring, they suspected, had life-giving properties. And when they splashed it on the dead woman, to see what would happen, she sat up as well and strong as ever. The merchant and his men froze in their tracks, and gazed at the woman and at one another with unbelieving eyes.

'Who are you?' the merchant asked her. 'Who killed you and left you here?'

She sobbed out her story.

'I will take you with me and make you my wife,' the merchant said. 'I am single, free to marry, and I can make you happy.'

'Thank you, kind merchant, but I am already a lawfully wedded wife,' she said.

The woman insisted she was still married to the man who murdered her, and it would be unlawful to marry another man.

'You will be sorry,' said the merchant.

'Never!' was her answer.

She made him so angry by her stubborn refusal to be his wife that he ordered his men to dig a well forty cubits deep and cast her into it, and to cover the mouth of the well with a big stone. The caravan left early the

Faithful Wife

next morning, and the woman screamed for help, but there was no one to hear her cries.

Three days later another caravan from Ispahan camped in this same spot, and this second merchant was puzzled when he heard the low moaning and wailing of a woman's voice. 'Find out where this voice is coming from,' he said to his men. They found the woman at the bottom of the well.

'Get me out of here!' she screamed. They lowered a rope and hauled her up. They took her to the merchant, who saw a lovely young woman standing before him, hiding her face behind her veil.

'Who are you? Who threw you into this well?' the merchant asked her.

She told him.

'Marry me, and your troubles will be over,' he said.

'Thank you, kind merchant, but I am already a lawfully wedded wife,' she said.

'You consider yourself married to the man who killed you?'

The woman nodded.

'I got you out of this well, I saved your life, and you are still hiding your face from me? Take off that veil.'

'You are a merchant, a man of the world, and you should know how to treat women,' she said. 'I scarcely know you yet. Don't be so impatient with me. I haven't eaten anything for three days. I am starved.'

The merchant took her to his tent, put his arm around her and drew her toward him. He tried to kiss her on the cheeks. She would not let him.

After he fed her a good meal the merchant said: 'Now you are mine and I am thine.'

She put him off and said: 'Let me go out for a few minutes. I'll be back.'

He waited and waited for her to come back. She disappeared into the night. He found only her mantle thrown over a rosebush to make it look like a woman in the dark.

'Some day we shall meet again,' the merchant said bitterly. 'I will find you sooner or later.'

The next man the woman met was a Kurdish shepherd, who gave her milk and bread, and then wanted to kiss and fondle her. She ran away from him too, while he gathered his flock. The shepherd ran after her, but the woman jumped into a river, and disappeared in the rushing waters before he could catch her. The shepherd turned back and sighed, 'I will find you some day.'

Apples of Immortality

The woman was swept out to the sea and was saved by a poor fisherman, who took her to his home. She was shivering, exhausted, half-dead. The fisherman's mother bathed her in warm water and gave her some of her own patched-up clothes to wear. They had boiled fish for supper. She thanked them for their kindness, thanked God, and after supper sat huddled in a corner of their hut.

The fisherman asked her many questions, and she told him her story.

'Will you marry me?' the fisherman said. 'I have no wife.'

'I am already a lawfully wedded wife, marrying you would be unlawful,' she said. 'Let us live together like sister and brother, if you don't mind.'

'As you wish,' he said.

From that day on this fisherman caught pearls in the sea. He did not know their value, though. He went to the bazaar to see if he could sell them to a jeweller.

'I will give you fifty gold pieces for each,' said a jeweller.

The fisherman smiled. He thought the man was joking.

'I will give you a hundred gold pieces.'

The fisherman smiled again, and the jeweller kept raising his offer until a bargain was struck and the fisherman sold his pearls for 500 gold pieces each.

The fisherman went home a rich man. He returned to the bazaar with his handkerchief full of more pearls. The jeweller counted them one by one and paid 500 gold pieces for each.

The fisherman went almost out of his mind with all that money. 'What shall I buy?' he wondered, and decided to buy wheat. 'I'll store away all the wheat I can and never go hungry again.'

He built a mansion for himself, with large storerooms, and filled them with sacks of wheat.

There was a dreadful famine a few years later, and people went crazy from hunger. The fisherman opened his storerooms and distributed his wheat free to famine-stricken people who came to his door. The young woman whose life he saved helped him in this work, dressed in man's clothes, wearing a man's cap. No one was turned away empty-handed from this home.

One day her own husband came all the way from Erevan to get some of this free wheat for their starving children. 'Wait in that room until I take care of these others,' she told him. He did not recognize her. And how could he? He thought his wife was dead. Later in the afternoon the two merchants and the Kurdish shepherd also turned up, and she asked them to wait in the same room, she was so busy. It never crossed their

Faithful Wife

minds that this handsome young man cheerfully giving away all that wheat was the faithful wife they had longed for all those years.

At last she was free to talk to these men.

'Where are you from?' she asked her husband.

'I am from Erevan, master,' he said with a humble bow.

The merchants said they were from Ispahan; the shepherd said he was from a small mountain hamlet.

She invited all four men, reduced to dire poverty by the famine, to dine with her, and no words can describe the lavish feast. She served them the finest foods and the finest wines. The feast continued far into the night, and when the men were drunk, she got up and said:

'Now, my friends, let us tell some stories. You merchants from Ispahan have travelled around, you have been to many cities, and I am sure you have some very good stories to tell.'

'Some years ago,' began the first merchant, 'I was travelling with my caravan and camped for a night near a spring I had not seen there before, and I knew that country well. I found the body of a beautiful young woman lying by the roadside, murdered, I thought, by her own husband. I reckoned it was a spring of immortality when the salted lake-trout we were boiling in water drawn from that spring turned into live fish and jumped out of the kettle. So we poured that powerful life-giving water on the dead woman to see what would happen, and lo and behold, she sat up and answered my questions. She told me her story. I asked her to marry me. She said she was already a lawfully wedded wife, that she did have a husband, meaning the man who murdered her, and marrying me would be unlawful. I could not reason with that woman, she was so stubborn. I lost my temper, and I ordered my men to dig a well forty cubits deep and throw her into it, and to close the mouth of the well with a big stone so that she could never get out of it alive. I turned a deaf ear to her pleas and cries and at daybreak departed with my caravan, leaving her in the well. That woman has been on my conscience ever since. I think of her day and night.'

'Thank you,' said their host, and turned to the other merchant.

'I met that same woman myself and got her out of the well. I too wanted to marry her, and she gave me the same answer: it would be unlawful. She wouldn't even let me kiss her. She ran away from my tent, and I never saw her again, though I have looked for her everywhere. I have not been able to forget that woman.'

It was the shepherd's turn next. 'That same beautiful woman came to me when I was herding my sheep. I gave her bread and milk, and she ate

Apples of Immortality

like a hungry wolf. I tried to make love to her, but she wouldn't let me. She made her escape while I was gathering my flock. I ran after her. She jumped into a river, and I never saw her again. I have looked for her everywhere, but have had no luck so far. I can't forget that woman.'

'Now it is your turn,' she said to her husband.

'O young master, I hardly know where to begin, I have so much to say. These men have already confessed, and I had better confess myself. I killed my own lawfully wedded wife.'

'Why did you kill her?' she asked him. 'How could you do such a thing?'

'It is a long story,' he sighed. 'I was out of work. I had a family to take care of. I was away for three years, working here and there, a stranger in other lands. When I got back to Erevan my brother told me my wife had been unfaithful to me during my absence. So I killed her. I learned later she was innocent. My heart has been filled with grief and remorse ever since. I am the guiltiest man here.'

'Would you recognize your wife if you were to see her again?' his host asked him.

'Of course I would.'

She found an excuse to leave the room, and returned wearing her own clothes, accompanied by the fisherman, and stood before them so that they would take a good look at her in all her youthful beauty.

The merchants and the shepherd started forward to embrace her. Her husband dropped to his knees and cried out in a sobbing voice: 'I sinned against you, forgive me!'

'God saved me for this day,' she said. 'My dear husband, I am still your lawfully wedded wife.'

The other men also begged for forgiveness on their knees. She forgave them and sent them away with enough wheat to carry them through the famine, and said to each, 'May God be with you.'

Then, turning to her husband, she said: 'As for your brother, I will not judge him myself, I leave that to you.'

'My brother wrecked my home,' he said.

'Go back to Erevan and bring our children here,' she said.

The man went home, banished his brother from his presence, and returned with their children to his faithful wife. And for the rest of their lives they lived with the old fisherman in ease and comfort, with no more cares and worries.

Three apples fell from heaven. One for him who ordered this tale, one for the teller, and one for the listener.

THE BOY WHO DID NOT WANT TO DIE

Once upon a time there lived a village priest and his wife who were getting on in years and had no children. 'Thank heaven, we have enough to live on, but we have no child,' they said. 'Maybe if we pray harder God will bless us with an offspring.'

God heard their prayers, and when his wife was with child, the priest decided to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

One day some time later the woman gave birth to a beautiful boy. She fainted away during the delivery, and the village shepherd sneaked into the room, stole the baby, and replaced it with a newborn lamb. The priest's wife opened her eyes and saw a pretty little lamb in swaddling clothes lying in bed beside her. 'Glory be to God!' she said, and nursed the lamb as though it were her own child, not suspecting what the shepherd had done.

When the priest came back from Jerusalem he bowed before the will of God. 'I am glad it's a lamb,' he said. 'I would have been happy even with a puppy for a child.'

The shepherd raised the stolen baby on the milk of the ewe that gave birth to the lamb the woman was nursing, and kept the boy locked up in a dark room for seven years. One day when the shepherd drove his flock through the village the priest's wife happened to be sitting at the door of her house with her Lamb-child in her lap, and the Lamb instantly recognized its mother and ran off to her. The woman was astonished to see a ewe and her Lamb-child bleating and licking each other.

'Why are they so glad to meet each other?' she asked the shepherd.

And the shepherd confessed what he had done, and returned the boy to his parents. They kissed him and hugged him and were very happy to have him back.



'May God be your judge,' the priest said to the shepherd, and let him go free.

The poor boy had not seen sunlight for seven years, and knew nothing about the outside world. A few days later his father came home from the village graveyard and the boy asked him what he had done there, and the priest said: 'Son, I just buried a man.'

When the boy learned people get old and die in this world he was very much upset and brooded over it. And one day he said to his father: 'If I am going to die like everybody else, I don't want to stay here. I will go away to another land, where there is no death.'

'Son, where there is birth, there is death,' said the priest.

His wife wept and pressed the boy to her breast. They pleaded with their son to stay with them; but he would not, and thought if he reached the land of Fate he had just heard about, he might live forever. He said good-bye to his parents and went off to find the land of Fate.

He walked on and on until he came to a huge plane tree and saw an Emerald Bird perched on top of it.

'Good day, Emerald Bird.'

'God's day, priest's son,' said the giant vulture.

'Emerald Bird, how do you know I am a priest's son?'

'Of course I know, and I also know that you are seeking a land where there is no death. Well, you have come to the right place. There is no death here.'

'No death? How? Tell me about it, Emerald Bird!'

The Boy Who Did Not Want to Die

'Every year I drop a feather on this plane tree, and I'll not die until this tree is completely covered with my feathers. Why don't you stay with me? You too will be deathless.'

'No, I think I'd better keep going,' said the boy.

He walked on and on until he came to an immense mound of millet—as high as Mt Aragaz. A man sat before this mountain of grain.

'Good day, uncle.'

'Welcome, priest's son.'

'How do you know I am a priest's son?'

'Of course I know, and I also know that you are seeking a land where there is no death. Well, you have come to the right place. There is no death here.'

'How? Tell me about it!'

'Do you see this mountain of millet? Every year I take one grain from it, and I know I'll live to the last grain, so I am not worried about death. Why don't you stay with me?'

He would not, and continued on his way until he came to a great ocean-sea, where he saw a sparrow scratching in the sand.

'Good day, brother sparrow!'

'God's day, priest's son.'

'How do you know I am a priest's son?'

'Of course I know. And I also know that you are seeking a land where there is no death. Well, you have come to the right place. There is no death here.'

'There is no death? How? Tell me about it!'

'Do you see this ocean-sea? I know I'll not die as long as I haven't emptied it out with my beak, one beakful of water a year. So figure it out for yourself how long it would take for this ocean-sea to dry up. Why don't you stay with me?'

'No. I'd rather keep going.'

Heaven only knows how far the boy travelled until he reached another great sea and heard a voice that came from the depths of the sea warning him: 'Do you know, priest's son, that you have come to the end of the world? Everything here melts at sunrise. You are so young, it would be a pity to see you melt from the sun's rays. Dig a hole in the ground and hide in it until the sun goes down. Father Fate lives on the other side of that mountain.'

The boy dug a hole and crouched in it when the sun came up the next morning. And after the sun went down he walked on to the other side of the mountain and saw Father Fate writing in a big ledger.

Apples of Immortality

'I am so glad to meet you, Father Fate. Is it true there is no death in your land?'

'It's true. Old age and death are unknown here.'

'May I stay with you, Father Fate?'

'You may, my boy.'

It's hard to say how long the boy lived with Father Fate, but he could never forget his own country and his parents, and he missed them more and more; they were always on his mind. 'I will go back,' he said to himself. 'If I die I'll die in my own country, and I'll be buried beside my parents.'

'I think I am going back,' he said to Father Fate. 'I have stayed here long enough.'

'You are free to go, my lad. I wouldn't hold you here against your will. You can come back if for any reason you decide not to stay in your own land.'

Father Fate gave the boy three apples of immortality and told him that by eating the apples he would not get old and die, and he could come back safe and sound if he changed his mind. 'Be sure to eat these apples yourself,' said Father Fate and warned him not to give them to somebody else. The boy thanked Father Fate, put the apples in his pocket, and bade him farewell.

During his long homeward trek the boy found the sparrow dead, and the ocean-sea dried up. 'Oh, I would have died also!' he said. Then he saw that the mountain of millet was gone and the man sitting before it was dead. 'Oh, I would have died also!' he said. He kept going and saw the plane tree covered with feathers and the Emerald Bird dead, beside it. 'Oh, I would have died also!' he said.

At last the boy reached his own village. He remembered where his house was, but could not find it. An old man was sitting where his house used to be.

'Pappy, our house was right here, when I lived in this village. Where is it now? I can't see it?'

'Whose son are you, my boy?'

'I am the priest's son.'

'There hasn't been a priest in my family for seven generations back, and I am a hundred and fifty years old.'

The boy sighed to himself: 'The Emerald-Bird dead, the mountain of millet gone, the ocean-sea dried up—how could my father and mother still be living?' And neither this old man nor anyone else in the village

The Boy Who Did Not Want to Die

knew anything about his parents. He decided to return to Father Fate, back to the land where there is no death.

On his way back he met an old woman who implored him: 'For the love of God give me a little water, I am dying of thirst!'

'I am sorry I have no water to give you,' he said, 'but take this apple. It will refresh you.'

As soon as the old woman ate the apple she became a young maiden of fifteen, but all of a sudden the boy himself grew a beard. He gave another apple to an old man who too was very thirsty, and while the old man became young by eating the apple, his own hair turned white. He kept going, and passed through a village where he saw a woman yoked to a plough with an ox. A man was driving the plough. They looked embarrassed when they saw him.

'Good day, brother ploughman.'

'Greetings, and a thousand blessings. This poor woman is my mother. We are too poor to buy another ox. Do you happen to have some water with you? We are dying of thirst.'

He felt so sorry for them that he took the remaining apple from his pocket, sliced it in two, and offered it to the woman and her son. And as soon as they ate the apple they became young and strong, and he fell down, dead.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

TALE OF THE ONE-EYED GIANT

Once upon a time there were three brothers, two youthful, with black hair and beards, and the other old, with white hair. They owned a roadside inn. One day a traveller stopped at their inn and the old man served his meal and waited on him, while his two brothers sat around, doing nothing. The old man was busy about the inn all day, and this bothered the guest.

'Look here, old man,' said the traveller, 'sit down for a while and let your brothers work. They are young.'

'I am the youngest,' said the man. 'After you finish your meal I will tell you how my hair turned white.'

The traveller could hardly wait to hear the man's story, and this is what the man told him :

There was a time when I didn't like to work. I rode around all day doing nothing. I couldn't get along with my brothers. We argued. We quarrelled. I told them I didn't care to live with them any more. I'd go away and never step into our house again.

I had a friend across the road, who too wanted to get away, and we decided to see the world, and never come back. We mounted our horses and rode off, headed for India, but lost our way, and crossing a desert wilderness at last reached the sea.

Here we had to give up our horses and travel by boat. A raging storm turned the sea upside down. It lasted for three days and three nights. Our boat was smashed against the rocks and broke into a thousand pieces. We were saved from drowning by clinging to a plank. We got ashore and tied the board to a rock. Walking along a path that wound through the woods, and looking for shelter, we came to a cave, its mouth closed by a huge millstone. We wondered who lived in the cave, and sat down to rest. We were worn out, and waited for the owner to come back.

Tale of the One-Eyed Giant

Towards evening a big flock of sheep moved down the path. It was good to see those sheep. They kept coming and crowding before the cave. But our hearts sank when we saw the shepherd. He was a big wild-looking fellow, more like a beast than man, with a single large eye in the centre of his forehead. He stared at us out of that one eye and muttered a welcome. He pushed the millstone aside with one hand, as if it were nothing, and drove the flock into the cave. Then the monster tore up a big plane tree by its roots, swung it to his shoulder, and entered the cave. We went in after him.

The one-eyed giant threw the tree down, broke it up with one hand, and lighted a fire to cook his meal. We were starving, and hoped he would give us something to eat, but what he did instead was to bind us with cords.

He nearly frightened us to death. We watched him hold his big skewer on the blazing logs. Then the monster grabbed my friend and drove the red-hot skewer into his chest. The poor man screamed and howled from the pain. The monster roasted my friend alive and ate him. Then he stretched out on his back and went to sleep.

I thought to myself: 'Tomorrow he will eat me!' I cut the cords with my teeth after gnawing on them nearly all night. I stood up and wondered how I could get out of that cave alive. I saw that the giant had replaced the millstone, and I knew that fifty men like me couldn't move that stone. The brute was snoring loudly. My hand was shaking as I bent down, picked up his skewer and held it over the fire. I drove that red-hot skewer deep into the giant's eye. He bellowed like a buffalo and sprang to his feet. He went wild from the pain, and pounded around the cave, flailing his arms, striking left and right and knocking himself from wall to wall in an effort to catch me, and meanwhile he grew more furious when he could not; I dodged him.

The monster gave the millstone another push and opened the mouth of the cave. He stood at the entrance and let his sheep out on by one. I feared it would be easier for him to catch me once the sheep were out of his way. So I crawled under the belly of the goat that was the bellwether of his flock, and trotted to the door on all fours. At last I was out of the cave, hiding under the woolly belly of the goat, and holding my breath.

'Now try to catch me!' I shouted, and ran. The one-eyed giant ran after me. Then he climbed a rock and screamed at the top of his voice. Other one-eyed giants rushed out of their caves and called back:

'What are you screaming for?'

Apples of Immortality

'Catch him! He put out my eye!'

All those one-eyed giants ran after me as I raced down to the seashore. I untied the plank, and got away before they could lay hands on me. They stopped at the edge of the water.

'Glory be to God!' I said, and sailed away on my board, moving slowly across the sea. I landed on another shore, not knowing where I was. Here I was walking along the shore when I saw ten or fifteen beautiful mermaids bathing in the sea. They laughed with merry voices and splashed around, but they fled and disappeared when they saw me.

The next day I dug a ditch and, hiding in the ditch, waited for the mermaids to come back. They did come back, and when they stepped out of the water I reached out and grabbed one of them, and the others screamed and fled.

'Let me go!' she cried. 'We don't match.'

'You are mine, mine!' I said, holding her firmly.

I kept that mermaid with me. We lived as man and wife. She bore me two lovely children. I never let her out of my sight. Then one day she said: 'Have a heart, man, how long are you going to keep me locked up like this? Let me take the children out for a walk in the garden.'

I was afraid she would run away with our children, but a man can't be that cruel and I let her go out with the children. And splash! they disappeared in the sea.

Ah, brother, a man's hair turns white when a thing like that happens to him. I lost my beautiful mermaid-wife and my two darling children. I waited there for a week or two, and in the end gave up all hope of ever seeing them again. They didn't come back. I gathered my wits about me and fled to another land, my heart full of grief.

I liked that country, where I worked for a rich man, and when I had earned a little money I married again. But as my luck would have it, my wife died a year later. Her kinsfolk began to butcher my cattle and sheep.

I said: 'Brothers, why are you butchering my cattle and sheep?'

They said: 'Don't you know the custom of our land? When a man dies here we bury his wife with him, and when the wife dies, we bury her husband with her. Your wife is dead, so what do you need all these cattle and sheep for?'

They built a coffin for my wife and another coffin for me.

They dragged me to my wife's grave, which was in a big cave jammed with coffins, giving me only a month's supply of food and drink. I wondered what would happen to me when my food and water gave out.

A week or two later another coffin was lowered into the cave. Well, if

Tale of the One-Eyed Giant

I hide it from you how can I hide it from God? I hoped and prayed that the corpse was a young man's, and his wife would keep me company. It was a young man's, and his bride, all dressed up and wearing her jewels, was very pretty. After the mourners left I approached the bride, mighty glad to see her, and we started talking.

'What a weird custom this is!' she said. 'My husband died yesterday and here I am buried alive with him.'



'God help us,' I said. 'They buried me with my wife. We've got to get out of here before we are dead, too.'

'Once you are in this accursed place you can't get out of it,' she said.

One day the girl and I were sitting around talking when a big black snake slithered out of a hole.

'Let's follow this snake,' I said. We dug through the hole made by the snake and crawled out of the cave, mighty glad to be back in the world and to see daylight. It was a seashore, where we came out and hired a boat. We wanted to get away from that country as fast as we could. While we were sailing away I saw that the boatman had an eye on the girl, who was now my wife. He tried to capsize the boat so that he could have her for himself. He tried it three times, and three times a voice from the depths of the sea warned the boatman: 'Take heed no harm comes to them or it will be the worse for you!' I recognized that voice as my mermaid-wife's. Her warning frightened the boatman and saved our lives. But the man wouldn't let me out of the boat until I paid him.

'I have no money on me,' I said. 'For heaven's sake let me go and get a job, and I will pay you later.'

'Then your wife must stay with me until you come back,' he said.

Apples of Immortality

While I was arguing with the boatman my two darling children came out of the waves and offered me a handful of precious stones. 'Father, take these precious stones and pay the boatman,' they said.

I just went crazy when I saw my children. I took them in my arms and kissed them and hugged them. Then with a splash they disappeared in the waves.

Now tell me, brother, how can a man go through all these trials and tribulations without his hair turning white?

THE FOX, THE WOLF, THE BEAR AND THE EMERALD-BIRD

There was once an Armenian king who had an only son. The lad was a ne'er-do-well and hunting was all he cared for. He hunted from morning to night. One day his father gave him a new bow, enough food to last him a few days, and told him to go earn his own living, he was tired of supporting such a son. The boy kissed his father's hand and went to seek his fortune.

Heaven only knows how far he went until he came to a large forest, where he built a cabin for himself and lived in it. He continued to hunt as before. Every day he had plenty of fresh meat to eat. He salted the rest and kept it in a cool cellar so that it wouldn't spoil.

A year went by, and a dreadful famine had all the beasts prowling around the woods searching high and low for food and not finding any. One day a Fox, whose stomach did nip-ups with hunger-pangs, happened to pass by this cabin and thought to himself: 'Maybe I'll find something to eat here.' Cautiously, step by step, he approached the hunter's cabin, and his mouth watered when he smelled the meats in the cellar. He looked for an opening and entered the cellar through a hole.

What a feast! He ate his fill of the salted meats and was ready to crawl out through the hole when he saw a man standing in the doorway. The hunter raised his bow and the Fox threw himself at his feet before the man could shoot him dead on the spot.

'Don't kill me, for heaven's sake! I am just a harmless Fox. Please let me stay with you. All you have to feed me is a little meat. I'll guard your house. I'll do anything you say.'

'Very well, if you are so harmless you may stay with me, but be sure you guard my house well.'

Apples of Immortality

The Fox was lucky. He had plenty to eat now and turned somersaults in the sun, while the other beasts were desperate for food and prowled around for weeks without finding anything to eat.

One day the Fox spotted a Wolf who was on his last legs. 'Hey, what's this?' the Wolf cried. 'The whole world is in the grip of a terrible famine and this fellow is hopping and skipping in the sun. At last, here is a juicy meal for me!'

The Wolf came to eat him up, and the Fox pleaded: 'Why do you want to eat me, Brother Wolf? Come, I'll show you a cellar where you can eat all you want. You haven't seen anything like it!'

The Wolf took the Fox at his word and crawled into the cellar with him.

He was so famished that he swallowed the bones too, and he was ready to burst from eating so much when the door flew open and in came the owner. The young prince saw he had a new uninvited guest in his cellar. He raised his bow, but the Fox didn't let him shoot the Wolf.

'He is all right, he won't do us any harm, let him stay with us. We shall guard your house together.'

'Very well, if he is so harmless, as you say, he can stay with us.'

The Fox and the Wolf lived together like true brothers, and with their bellies full, played in the sun from morning to bedtime.

One day a Bear came lumbering along, gnashing his teeth. As soon as he laid eyes on the Fox and the Wolf he wanted to devour them.

'Brother Bear,' pleaded the Fox, 'why should you want to eat us when we can take you to the meat cellar where you can eat all you want.'

'All right,' growled the Bear, 'I won't touch you if you want to do me such a favour.'

The Bear followed them to the cellar. The poor fellow hadn't seen the sight of meat for weeks, and as he kept stuffing his mouth with all this choice venison he said: 'Wonderful! Wonderful! This is too good to be true!'

The door flew open and in came the young prince. He saw he had another uninvited guest in his cellar and took aim with his bow, but the Fox didn't let him kill the Bear.

'May the king's son live long, this Bear is harmless like us. Please don't let him starve to death. The three of us will guard your house together.'

'Very well, if he is so harmless, he can stay.'

So they were three now. They ate and played together all day, with not a care in the world, and forgot all about the famine.

The Emerald Bird came flying over the woods, flapping his enormous

The Fox, the Wolf, the Bear, and the Emerald-Bird

wings and making awful sounds. He saw these frolicsome beasts playing in the sun and swooped down on them. But before the Emerald Bird started pecking at them the Fox pleaded:

‘Have a heart, Brother Bird! There is plenty of other food for you. Come along, we’ll show you.’

They led him to the cellar. The Emerald Bird was gorging on all the meats stored in it when the door flew open and the hunter found he had another uninvited guest in his cellar. The Fox saved the Bird’s life.

‘He is harmless. Let him stay with us. The four of us will guard your house together.’

The Fox, the Wolf, the Bear and the Emerald Bird lived with their master for seven years. The famine was over, there was again plenty of food in the woods and in the villages nearby, and they thought they had better go away and shift for themselves.

But the Fox said: ‘This man kept us all these years. Let’s do him a good turn before we get out of here. He is still single. So let’s go find him a wife. I have heard the King of Trebizond has a very lovely daughter, a praiseworthy maiden in every way.’

‘Yes, let’s go to Trebizond!’ cried the others.

And off they went to Trebizond, and heaven only knows how far they travelled before they reached that city. The king’s men were ploughing his fields near the royal palace. It was so warm at midday that the tillers left the plough in the field and went to rest in the shade. The Fox led his mates to the king’s field, yoked the Bear and the Wolf to the king’s plough, and had them drag it across the field while he himself gripped the handles, and acted as leader. And meanwhile the Emerald Bird hovered overhead, with wings outspread. They sang a ploughman’s song as they tilled the field, and when the king’s men saw what they were doing, they were so frightened they ran to the king and told him about it.

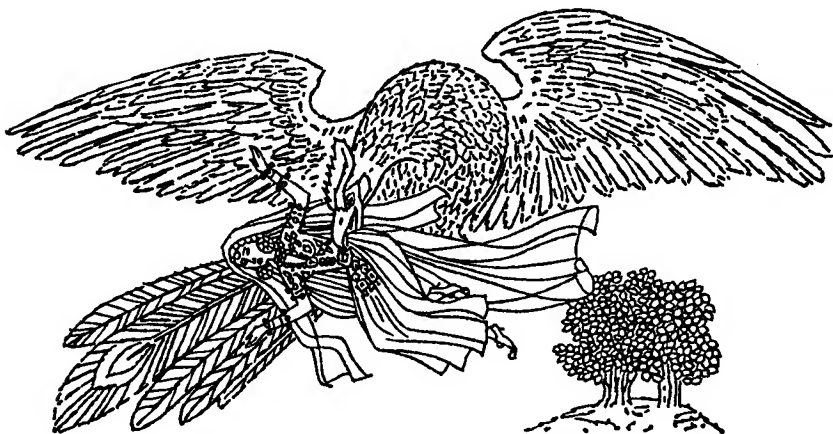
The king, the queen and their daughter came out on the balcony of the palace to watch this incredible scene, and while they were watching the Emerald Bird swooped down, snatched up the princess, and holding her tight in his beak flew away. There were cries for help from all sides, but nobody could stop the Emerald Bird or bring him down as he soared higher and higher with the princess. The Fox, the Wolf and the Bear dropped the plough in the field and slipped back to the woods.

They reached the cabin of their master with the Wolf carrying the princess on his back. ‘May the king’s son live long,’ they said, ‘we went to Trebizond to fetch your bride.’

Apples of Immortality

Their master was dazzled by the beauty of this peri-like maiden, and the Fox told him how they kidnapped her.

The King of Trebizond was informed of his daughter's whereabouts and sent his army to bring her back. When the prince saw the troops coming in countless numbers he didn't know where to hide himself. The Fox encouraged him and said :



'May the king's son live long, you stay out of this battle, we know how to deal with these men.'

The soldiers were caught between the Wolf and the Bear on one side, the Fox and the Emerald Bird on the other. The Bird pecked out their eyes, the Wolf tore off their limbs, the Bear crushed their bones, the Fox scratched and bit their faces. They smashed the whole army to pieces, and the King of Trebizond had to sue for peace.

'For heaven's sake stop this slaughter ! What is done is done. You can keep my daughter. I am pulling my troops back.'

The Fox, the Wolf, the Bear and the Emerald Bird went up to their master and said : 'May the king's son live long, the famine is over and we don't want to be a burden on you any more.'

Their master let them go. He took his beautiful bride and returned to his own land. He made up with his father, and the king was glad to have his son back.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

SHREWISH WIFE

Once upon a time there lived a man and his wife. They were very poor, destitute. The man worked as a field labourer, or herded sheep, or sold brushwood or dried manure he picked up here and there. He worked hard, but his wife always found fault with him and kept nagging him.

She was at it every God's day. 'Buy me this, buy me that; bring me this, bring me that. I don't like this calico, get another pattern!'

The woman drove him nearly out of his mind. He was so worried he didn't know whether he was coming or going. 'Look here, wife, we barely manage to make both ends meet,' he said. 'If you keep this up we'll starve to death like a couple of beggars.'

His wife wouldn't listen. She was a mean, stubborn woman. He couldn't put up with her nagging any more, and one day he just walked out, taking with him nothing but some flat sheets of bread to eat on his way. He intended to go as far away from her as possible. The man walked and walked and somewhere out on the plain, with not a house in sight, saw a big round stone. He huffed and puffed and raised the stone, and found a deep well under it. The man heard some strange noises coming out of the well. He was so frightened that he replaced the stone and ran home, thinking this well was just the right place for his Shrewish Wife. He'd fool her!

'O my wife,' he said, 'when I was out gathering brushwood I saw a big round stone. I raised it to see what was under it, and what did I find but a well, full of gold rings and diamonds and pearls and every kind of precious stone you can imagine. A regular treasure-house! Ah, it did my heart good to see so many jewels sparkling together in one place!'

'Really? You aren't joking?' she said.

'If you don't believe me come with me and I'll show you.'

They got up the next morning, before daybreak, took a long rope and some food with them, and scurried for miles through all that wilderness until they reached the well. The man raised the stone.

Apples of Immortality

'O my wife, tie this rope around my waist and let me down into the well to haul up all this treasure.'

'O my husband, I am going down into this well myself. You will take all the best pieces yourself and leave me nothing but the cheap ones.'

What does a blind man need? A pair of eyes. This was exactly what the man wanted his wife to do. He tied the rope around her waist and lowered her into the well. When she reached the bottom, he dropped the rope, closed the mouth of the well with the big stone, and went home.

'To hell with her,' he thought. 'I got rid of her. I won't care even if I myself burn and curl up in the fires of hell.'

A day, two days, three days, a week passed, and he said to himself: 'I'd better go take a look and see if she is still alive.'

Back at the well, the man listened. He had never heard such an awful racket. As soon as he pushed the heavy stone a little to one side and peered down through the crack, he heard voices calling him from below: 'O mortal, open the well and let us out of here! We can't stay with the Shrewish Wife.'

He felt sorry for them and removed the stone. And oh-oh, what did he see? Devils popping out of the well one after another. He nearly died of fright.

The chief of the devils said: 'Don't be afraid, we are not going to harm you, you saved us from the clutches of the Shrewish Wife and we intend to repay you for your kindness. I am going to enter the body of the king's daughter. No healer, no drug, nothing, and nobody in the world can cure the king's daughter while I'm inside her. When you hear about it, go straight to the king and say: "May the king live long, I can cure your daughter." As soon as you enter her chamber I'll come out of her and go my way. She will get well, don't worry. She will be as sound as on the day she was born.'

The Devil scampered off and disappeared with his mates. The man went home. Some time later the whole village was talking about the king's daughter. 'She lost her mind, she is raving mad, they have her tied hand and foot with forty chains, no healer in the world, nothing can cure her, it's hopeless,' they said.

The man went straight to the king and said: 'I am a healer and I can cure your daughter.'

'You cure her, my good fellow, and I will give you anything you want,' said the king.

They led him to the girl's chamber, and he saw that truly she was

tied hand and foot with forty chains. He pretended to write a prescription for her and mumbled some words into his beard as though praying for her recovery. When the Devil saw him he came out of the girl's body and said: 'I shall now go to India and enter the body of the king's daughter there. Don't you dare come after me. If you do, I will enter your body.'

'Follow you all the way to India? Do you think I am crazy?'

The Devil scampered off and disappeared again. The man freed the young princess of her chains, and she was well, as sound again as on the day she was born. The king was overjoyed and said: 'My friend, tell me what reward you want.'

'May the king live long, I shall be satisfied with anything you offer me.'

'Well, in that case, I give you my daughter. Take her as your wife. She is lawfully yours. I had given up all hope for her recovery. I am so happy!'

Their wedding was celebrated for seven days and seven nights.

The Devil went to India and entered the body of the king's daughter. Not all the healers in the world could cure the Indian princess. The king's men told him about a famed healer who had cured the daughter of another king after she went mad, and then married her. They said this great healer was the only one to cure the princess. The king of India sent for this healer, and threatened war if he did not come.

The poor man did not know what to do when he received the king's summons. If he did not go to India, there would be war between the two kings. If he did go, the Devil would enter *his* body. He thought it over and decided to take a chance and go.

He left for India with the king's man who brought him the summons, and heaven only knows how far he travelled before reaching the king's castle in India.

'Can you really cure my daughter?' the king asked.

'May the king live long, that is up to God,' he said.

They took him to a chamber in the castle where the young princess, raving mad, was kept in chains. As soon as the Devil saw him, he spoke up and said: 'Didn't I warn you not to come after me? How dare you?'

'Shhh, brother Devil, do you think I came all the way to India just for this woman's sake? I wouldn't think of doing such a thing after your warning. I came to inform you that the Shrewish Wife crawled out of the well and is searching for you. She heard you are in India, and she is

Apples of Immortality

after your hide, she is on her way here. You'd better get away before it's too late.'

'Woe is me!' cried the Devil. 'I am coming out right now and I'll be on my way to another land before that Shrewish wife gets here.'

The Devil fled, and the Indian princess was cured, as sound as on the day she was born. The man took her chains to her father, and the king rewarded him with the man's weight in gold, and sent him back to his own land.

HABERMANY, THE SERPENT-PRINCE

Once upon a time there was an old man who lived with his wife in a shack on the outskirts of the city. They had no children. 'Time is passing, who will take care of us in our old age and bury us when we die? We don't even have a daughter to go out and beg for us.' This was the wife's bitter complaint every day.

'O wife, God is merciful,' the man said. 'God will look after us, and don't worry, we won't die of hunger.'

The old man tried to make a living by selling firewood, but in the winter he and his wife had to go from door to door begging for a crust of bread, and thus they kept body and soul together. One day as he swung his load of firewood over his shoulder he saw a wild duck fly out from under the brush.

'Let me see what's in there,' he said.

He found three eggs, picked them up, and started for home. When he got home he showed the eggs to his wife. 'Here is a gift from heaven,' he said. 'Three duck's eggs. I'm starving, wife. Fry one and let's eat it tonight.'

She fried the egg, and they ate it. The next day he asked his wife to fry another egg for supper.

'A neighbour's hen can set on these eggs and after they are hatched we can raise ducks and have fresh eggs every day,' she said.

'Fry one more and you can do what you like with the other,' said the old man.

They ate the second egg also, and she saved the third egg for hatching. The next day when her husband came home from the woods and she wanted to hide the remaining egg she found it already hatched, and saw that a snake had come out of it. She was so frightened she ran screaming to her husband.

Apples of Immortality



'What happened, wife? What are you screaming for?'

'A snake has come out of the egg I saved for hatching!'

'Nonsense! That egg was laid by a duck, how can a snake come out of a duck's egg?'

'Take your stick and kill it, quick!'

'Where is my stick?'

The old woman was looking for her husband's stick when the snake crept into the room and the old couple turned deathly pale. The snake spoke in a human voice:

'Looking for a stick or something to kill me, eh? There isn't a man in the world who can kill me. If you do what I tell you no harm will come to you and from now on you can live in ease and comfort. But if you don't, I will kill you both. You prayed to God to give you a son. Well, God sent me to be your son. Pappy, I want you to go to the king tomorrow morning and tell him your son wants to marry his youngest daughter.'

'Are you mad?' said the old man. 'Who am I to talk to the king? We are beggars. Do you want the king to chop off my head? You are a snake, what do you want a wife for anyway?'

'I am not a snake. I will tell you some day who I am. But don't breathe a word about my not being a snake. Not for the present. If you do, I'll disappear and you'll never see me again.'

What could the poor man do? He was glad the snake did not kill them, and thought a snake in the house might bring them luck. He got up the next morning, took up his walking stick and went to the king's palace. The guards ordered him away. They laughed at him when he

wanted to sit on the stone-bench before the palace gate. One of the guards tossed him a copper coin and said: 'Don't you know this stone-bench is for royal suitors? The man who sits on this bench wants to propose to the king's daughter. If you have a complaint to make, go to a judge. You have come to the wrong place.'

'For heaven's sake let me in. I've got to talk to the king,' the old man pleaded with the guards.

The king's chamberlain came out. 'What's going on here?'

'This old beggar wants to see the king.'

'What do you want to see the king for?' the chamberlain asked the old man.

'My son wants to marry the king's daughter.'

The chamberlain went into the palace and said to the king: 'Congratulations, my king. Your daughter has a new suitor, and his father wants to see you about it.'

'Let him come in, and let's see who he is,' said the king.

'He is not the kind of man you would want for a son-in-law. He is nothing but a beggar.'

'So it has come to this,' the king sighed. 'Even a beggar thinks he can ask for my daughter's hand in marriage. Chamberlain!'

'Yes, my king.'

'Hand him over to the executioner and throw his carcass to the stray dogs outside the city. Let it be a lesson to others.'

The king's order was carried out.

The snake knew what happened. 'Nanny,' he said to the old man's wife.

'Yes, my child.'

'The king's men slew pappy this morning. They put him in a sack and will throw him to the dogs. You will see the men carrying the sack pass by our door. Tell them you are his wife and ask them to give you the sack.'

The old woman sat weeping at her door. The men carrying the sack had a long way to go yet and were glad to get rid of it. She fell on the sack and cried to the Snake: 'They killed him because of you! You ruined my life!'

'They just slashed pappy into four pieces, that's all,' said the Snake. 'Don't worry, he isn't dead. Go make his bed.'

She went to make her husband's bed.

When she came back, the old man was sound asleep and breathing

Apples of Immortality

loudly through his nose. She laughed, she was so happy. They took the old man to his bed, and he was up the next morning, hale and hearty.

The Snake crawled up to him and said: 'Pappy, I sent you to the king yesterday. What did he say?'

The old man told him what happened. 'I felt the blow of the executioner's sword, and the next thing I knew I was lying here in my own bed. I don't know how I got here. I told you I had no business going to the palace. The king doesn't sit down and talk with the likes of us. A poor man like me should know his place and keep to his own kind.'

'Go ask him again. Don't be afraid. I want to know his answer, one way or another.'

The old man went back to the stone-bench. The chamberlain saw him sitting there and said to the king: 'The old beggar's back.'

The king stamped his foot. 'Then you didn't carry out my orders!'

Ten councillors who witnessed the execution testified for the chamberlain and the king spared his life.

'This time don't cut him into four pieces,' the king commanded, 'but chop him up to shreds, put the pieces in a sack and throw the sack into the river.'

And that's what they did to the old man.

The Snake knew all about it and said: 'Nanny, pappy is in bad shape today. They really cut him up this time. You will see two men carrying him in a sack.'

The old woman again sat by her door crying. She saw the two men carrying the sack. 'Sons, that's my husband,' she said. 'Who can ward off the king's wrath? For the love of God give that sack to me so that I can bury my husband.'

They tossed the sack into her yard and ran. The old woman wept bitterly over her husband's remains. The Snake came out and said: 'Nanny, don't cry. Close the gate, and go make his bed.'

She closed the gate, and while she was making her husband's bed the Snake bit into the sack and flicked the old man back to life. The man sat up, all one piece again, and as sound as on the day he was born. His wife threw her arms around her husband's neck and kissed him on the cheeks.

The Snake said: 'Nanny, you can kiss him later. Take him to his bed now. I want to talk to him.'

The old woman took him to his bed and tucked him in. The Snake asked him: 'Pappy, what's the news?'

'Son, this time they wouldn't even speak to me.'

'I've got to know the king's answer. Ask him again. And he had better say yes, or I'll turn his throne upside down.'

'Son,' said the old woman, 'do you want him to be chopped up again? They have killed him twice already.'

'Nanny, don't let that worry you, I am the Serpent Prince, and I can bring him back to life if they kill him a hundred times.'

The old beggar went back to the palace to seek an audience with the king.

The king came out with his chamberlain and councillors and saw him sitting on the stone-bench. 'Who is that old man? What does he want?' the king asked.

The chamberlain and councillors were too frightened to speak.

'I asked you a question. Why don't you answer?'

'May the king live long,' said the chamberlain who carried out the king's order, 'he is the same old beggar we slew twice.'

'This is very strange indeed. We shall find out what is at the bottom of this. There could be some magic in his revival. Let him come in.'

The king returned to his throne and the old beggar was brought before him, and bowed seven times.

'What do you want, old man?' the king asked.

'My son wants to marry your daughter, and by God's law, I came to ask for her hand.'

'Weren't you here before?'

'Twice.'

'What answer did you get?'

The old beggar told the king what happened, and added: 'I came back so that we can talk about it face-to-face.'

The king turned to his chamberlain and councillors and said: 'You'd better leave this matter to me.'

'May the king live long,' said the courtiers, and withdrew.

'Pappy, what does your son do? What is his occupation?'

'My son doesn't work, he has no occupation, he stays home all day coiled in a corner of the house. He is a snake.'

'Well, well, so your son isn't even a human being!'

'He is a Serpent Prince.'

The king pondered this for a while. 'Very well, if he is a Serpent Prince as you say he may wed my daughter, but you must first build a palace for her so high that it will overshadow my palace, and have it ready tomorrow morning.'

Apples of Immortality

The old man was crushed. He went home, and the Snake asked him : 'Well, pappy, you look worried, what's the news?'

'Son, the king wants us to build for his daughter a palace so high that it will overshadow his own palace and have it ready tomorrow morning before he gives us his daughter. There isn't a man living who can carry out such a crazy order.'

'Pappy, do you remember those three eggs you found under the brush?'

'I remember.'

'You will see a snake's hole in that same spot. Go speak into that hole and say: "O young mistress, the young master wants you to send him his little palace with all its furnishings and his twelve servants."'

The old man went back to the woods and spoke these words into the snake hole. A voice answered him from below : 'We are sending them, old man !'

When he came home his shack had disappeared and a magnificent mansion, seven stories high, rose in its place, with a pleasure-garden and marble pools, rugs and paintings hanging on the walls. The king's palace was nothing by comparison. All the neighbours were gazing at it with their mouths open.

The servants took off the old man's rags and dressed him in princely garments, worth a thousand silver pieces. They draped his shoulders with a sable-coat worth five hundred silver pieces. They handed him a staff the head of which was studded with precious stones and worth a thousand silver pieces.

The Snake came up to him and said : 'Pappy, you can now go to the king and ask for his daughter's hand, and this time there will be a wedding, I am sure.'

The proud old man went back to the palace, and the chamberlain met him at the gate and bowed low before him.

'Don't stand still and stare at me like that ! Hurry up and tell the king I am here.'

The chamberlain ran. The king said : 'Let him come in.'

The old man strode into the palace and stood before the king, looking like a king himself. The king was amazed. Was this the ragged old beggar?

'Did you do what I told you?' the king asked.

'Just step out on your balcony and take a look at it.'

The king went out to his balcony and saw a palace that overshadowed his : seven stories high, built of gold and silver bricks and gleaming with

gems. His own palace was only five stories high and built of ordinary brick. The beggar's mansion glowed and glittered in the sun and lit up the whole city.

'From now on I shall call you my kinsman, and not just "old man,"' said the king. 'I can hardly believe my eyes. How did you do it? I have, however, another request to make of you.'

'I'll give you anything you ask for your daughter.'

'Let's settle it then. I want seven camel-loads of diamonds, emeralds, hyacinths and brilliants. Have them delivered at my door by a driver one foot high, with a beard seven feet long.'

'This crafty old fellow is going to get my daughter if I don't watch out,' the king said to himself.

The beggar went home. The Snake asked him: 'Well, pappy, what did the king say this time?'

'He wants seven camel-loads of diamonds, emeralds, hyacinths and brilliants to be delivered by a driver a foot high, with a beard seven feet long.'

'Well, go back to that same hole in the woods and say, "Young mistress, the young master wants you to send him seven camel-loads of diamonds, emeralds, hyacinths and brilliants, to be delivered by a driver one foot high, with a beard seven feet long.'

The old man did so, and the voice answered him from below: 'It's on the way!'

The old man came back and saw seven camels resting before his mansion. The driver was a foot high and had a beard seven feet long wound around his waist. The old man led the caravan to the king's palace and said: 'May the king live long, I brought you the gems you ordered.'

The king stored them away in his treasure-house. He showed a fistful to his money-changers. 'What would you give for one of these stones?'

'A thousand silver pieces,' they said.

The king said to the old beggar: 'My dear kinsman, you brought me what I wanted. And now here is another request. I want the road from my gate to the church gate, from the church gate to your gate, to be covered with a carpet woven in one piece, and I want the road to be lined with plane trees so thick that four men cannot girth their trunks with their arms. Have them ready by tomorrow morning.'

'He can't do it, and he won't get my daughter,' the king said to himself.

The old man went home. The Snake crept up to him and asked: 'What did the king say this time?'

Apples of Immortality

'The king wants the road from his gate to the church gate, from the church gate to our gate to be covered with a carpet woven in one piece, and lined with plane trees so thick that four men cannot girth their trunks with their arms, and he wants everything to be ready by tomorrow morning.'

'That won't be too hard. We can do it, pappy. You go back to that same hole in the woods and say to the young mistress I want this carpet and these plane trees to be sent over right away, with bulbuls singing in the trees.'

The voice answered from below: 'We are sending them!'

The old man came back and found the road covered with a carpet and with plane trees reaching high in the sky. 'Well, pappy, go to the king and see what he says this time.'

The old man went back to the palace. The chamberlain met him at the gate.

'Chamberlain, go tell the king his kinsman wishes to see him.'

The old man was led before the king. The king said: 'Did you do what I said?'

'Just step out and see for yourself.'

The king went out on his balcony and saw that the old man did it again. 'What is all this bird music I hear?'

'May the king live long, I brought you not only all the plane trees you ordered, but I added a little present of my own and also brought you the bulbuls to sing in them.'

'Well, here is my final request before I give you my daughter. Fetch me a wedding gown for my daughter, made of material the like of which does not exist in my kingdom, and without a single stitch in it. I also want seven bands of bagpipes and drums to play for the wedding without being seen by anyone. And next time you come to see me bring along that Serpent Prince of yours.'

The old man went home. 'Didn't the king promise his daughter? What does he want this time?' the Snake asked.

The old man told him what the king said.

'You go back to that hole and say: 'Young mistress, the young master wants a wedding gown for his bride without a single stitch in it, and asks that you send up also seven invisible bands of drums and bagpipes to play for his wedding.'

The man went back to the woods, and received a walnut through the snake hole. 'Take this walnut, you'll find the wedding gown in it,' said the voice below. 'And we are sending over the seven bands, too.'

'Come to the wedding!' the old man shouted.

'We can't, it's too far. We'll celebrate it down here.'

The old man turned around and went home. The city boomed with bagpipes and drums. The Enchanted-Serpent stood on his tail and said: 'Pappy, gather our neighbours; let's go.'

They invited all their neighbours to the wedding and the Snake led them to the king's palace. The king ordered his chamberlain to receive them with honours. The Snake entered the throne-room flanked by two councillors.

'My dear kinsman,' the king said to the old beggar. 'I can hear the bagpipes and drums playing the way I wanted them to play. Good. Now let me see if you brought the wedding gown.'

The old man handed him the walnut. The king cracked it open, and the wedding gown, the sheerest marvel, came out of it. The king sent for his wife and three daughters, two of whom were already married. They came and stood before him.

The king said: 'Take a good look at this wedding gown, the like of which does not exist in my kingdom; it does not have a single stitch in it. Help her dress and get ready for the wedding.'

The queen and the two elder daughters prostrated themselves before the king and cried out: 'How can you be a king and give your daughter to a Snake, when there are so many handsome princes in the kingdom for her to choose from?'

The king said: 'I am a man of my word and can't go back on my promise.'

He stamped his foot. 'Dress her at once!'

The queen and the two married daughters dressed the bride with tears in their eyes. There was not a more beautiful maiden in the kingdom. Then they all came and stood before the king.

'Here is your bride,' the chamberlain said to the Snake.

The Snake stood up on his tail, bowed seven times before the king, turned around and bowed to all the people in the throne-room, then went up to his bride and seized the skirt of her gown with his teeth to take her to church for the wedding rite.

And so the king's daughter married the Snake and the wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights while the invisible bands played, the nightingales sang in the plane trees, and the guests danced and made merry. After seven days the guests went home, and the bride was taken to the groom's mansion. The young couple retired to the nuptial chamber.

'Come to the wedding!' the old man shouted.

'We can't, it's too far. We'll celebrate it down here.'

The old man turned around and went home. The city boomed with bagpipes and drums. The Enchanted-Serpent stood on his tail and said: 'Pappy, gather our neighbours; let's go.'

They invited all their neighbours to the wedding and the Snake led them to the king's palace. The king ordered his chamberlain to receive them with honours. The Snake entered the throne-room flanked by two councillors.

'My dear kinsman,' the king said to the old beggar. 'I can hear the bagpipes and drums playing the way I wanted them to play. Good. Now let me see if you brought the wedding gown.'

The old man handed him the walnut. The king cracked it open, and the wedding gown, the sheerest marvel, came out of it. The king sent for his wife and three daughters, two of whom were already married. They came and stood before him.

The king said: 'Take a good look at this wedding gown, the like of which does not exist in my kingdom; it does not have a single stitch in it. Help her dress and get ready for the wedding.'

The queen and the two elder daughters prostrated themselves before the king and cried out: 'How can you be a king and give your daughter to a Snake, when there are so many handsome princes in the kingdom for her to choose from?'

The king said: 'I am a man of my word and can't go back on my promise.'

He stamped his foot. 'Dress her at once!'

The queen and the two married daughters dressed the bride with tears in their eyes. There was not a more beautiful maiden in the kingdom. Then they all came and stood before the king.

'Here is your bride,' the chamberlain said to the Snake.

The Snake stood up on his tail, bowed seven times before the king, turned around and bowed to all the people in the throne-room, then went up to his bride and seized the skirt of her gown with his teeth to take her to church for the wedding rite.

And so the king's daughter married the Snake and the wedding feast lasted for seven days and seven nights while the invisible bands played, the nightingales sang in the plane trees, and the guests danced and made merry. After seven days the guests went home, and the bride was taken to the groom's mansion. The young couple retired to the nuptial chamber.

Habermanny, the Serpent-Prince

'Very well, thank heaven.'

'How is your . . . Snake?'

'He lies huddled in his corner, the poor thing.'

'We didn't sleep a wink last night, we have been so worried about you.'

'Oh, there is nothing to worry about. I am very happy!'

The princess served her mother and sisters a meal the like of which they had never eaten even on a feast day in the palace. As they rose to go the queen whispered in her ear: 'The king could not go back on his promise, you know, but why should you live with a snake? Just take a rock and crush his head.'

'Mother, I want you to leave my house at once, and don't you ever come to see me again if you feel like that about my husband.'

'How is my daughter?' the king asked the queen.

'She seems very happy. She was upset when we told her to take a rock and crush that snake's head.'

They did not see her again for ten days. The king's heralds announced in all parts of the city that the king was giving a great feast, to be followed by a three-day tournament, and all men with good horses and skilful with the javelin and mace were ordered to compete for the king's prizes. Those who did not would have their heads chopped off.

A thousand warriors gathered in the royal arena before the palace, and tables were spread for the feast. The city boomed with battledrums and bagpipes. All the great warriors and princes of the kingdom were present at the feast and everybody talked about the tournament.

'Bring our daughter over here, and let her enjoy the tournament,' the king said to the queen. 'It will do her good.'

The Enchanted Serpent said to his wife: 'King's daughter, your mother is coming to take you to the tournament. I will take part in it myself, riding my white horse and dressed in white. You will see me swinging my white mace and knocking men off their horses by the score, but remember what I told you: not a word about our secret! Your sisters will brag about their husbands. "You married a snake," they will say. Don't tell them, "My husband is not a snake, he is a king's son," and start bragging about me. You will never see me again if you do. I will change into a black cloud and disappear from this world, and everything we own, our mansion, our pleasure-garden, all these marble pools will vanish into thin air.'

He had scarcely spoken these words when the queen arrived. 'Come, my daughter, and watch the tournament with us,' she said.

'How can I? I can't leave my husband alone.'

Apples of Immortality

'Oh, your Snake! Let him be alone for a while. What of it? Who cares?'

The Snake said: 'Nanny, won't you take me along with you? I'd like to watch that tournament myself.'

'What will you do at the tournament? Do you want their horses to trample you to death?'

The princess returned to the palace with her mother. She kissed the king's hand, and he kissed her on the forehead and said:

'Don't worry, my daughter, you will be freed of him before long.'

The king, the queen and their three daughters watched the contest from the balcony. The husbands of the elder sisters were among the players, riding their horses. There were five hundred men on each side.

Habermamy took off his snake-skin, dressed in royal garments, leaped on the back of his splendid white stallion and stormed into the arena swinging his white mace, and his horse kicking up showers of fiery sparks. He joined the battle and then he went after his brothers-in-law and knocked them off their horses. Nobody knew this mysterious rider on a fiery horse, who proved to be the best player in the field.

'I hope he falls off his horse and breaks his arm,' one of the sisters said.

'Why do you say that? He has as much right to play in this tournament as your husband,' the youngest sister protested.

'My husband is a man. What is yours? A Snake, hiding in a crack in the wall. You can't even talk with him.'

'If it was God's will that I marry a Snake, I am glad I did.'

The game was over, the players scattered while the White Rider rode up to the king and received his prize.

'What's your name?' the king asked.

'I will tell you my name on the last day of the tournament. Farewell, my king.' And the White Rider was gone. They saw the fiery dust kicked up by his horse, but not the rider.

The king got up and went into the palace with the queen and his daughters.

'Don't go back to your Snake,' he urged his youngest daughter. 'Stay with us.'

'No, I can't. I have to go,' she said.

'How can you live with a Snake, my daughter?'

'What can I do? You gave me to him yourself. If it was my fate to marry a snake, I am not complaining.'

She got up and went home. The Snake was coiled up in his corner.

'Wife, lock the doors and step on my tail.'

She stepped on his tail, and he sprang out of his snake-skin with a loud noise.

They embraced and kissed each other. He said :

‘King’s daughter, I am glad you held your tongue and told them nothing about me. Soon the forty days will be over, and I shall go to the palace with you and present myself to the king in my human form, and as befits a prince of my rank.’

They went to bed; slept. Ten days later the king proclaimed another holiday, and the riders gathered for the second match of the tournament.

‘Let my daughter come again and enjoy the contest with her sisters,’ the king said to the queen.

The queen went to the gold-and-silver mansion to fetch her youngest daughter.

The Enchanted-Serpent said : ‘Wife, king’s daughter, your mother is coming to take you to the tournament. This time I shall ride my Red horse and be dressed in red and carry a red mace. Be sure you do not betray our secret no matter what your mother and sisters say.’

The queen came in through the door and said : ‘Come, my daughter, let’s go watch the tournament.’

The Snake said : ‘Nanny, let her come home as soon as she can. I have no feet and no arms to prepare my meal, I am helpless without my wife.’

‘You can starve to death for all I care,’ muttered the queen. When the Red Rider stormed into the arena, waving his red mace, and fiery sparks flying from under the hooves of his horse, he put a thousand men to flight. And once again the king had to give him the prize. The two elder sisters sighed and wished the Red Rider were their husband, and they kept scolding the youngest sister for marrying a Snake.

Who was this Red Rider? Nobody knew. They saw only the dust kicked up by his fiery horse as he snatched his prize, and was gone in a flash.

The crowd scattered. His wife refused to stay with her parents and went home.

The Enchanted-Serpent was waiting for her. ‘Well, king’s daughter, I was worried. It makes me sad to think you might reveal our secret.’

‘Never ! Your secret stays with me,’ she said.

A few days later the players gathered in the arena for the third match.

‘This is the last day of the tournament,’ said the king, ‘and we ought to celebrate it with a feast.’

The queen went to fetch her youngest daughter.

The Serpent Prince said in a sad voice : ‘Your mother is coming over

Apples of Immortality

to take you to the tournament. I shall ride my Black horse, be dressed in black, and carry my black mace. Today you will see me playing my best game, and your sisters, your parents, everybody will wonder who I am. The forty days will be over in three more days, after which I do not care who knows. In three days I shall cease to be a snake. The king will invite me to his palace and we shall eat, drink and make merry together. So let me warn you for the last time not to reveal our secret and remind you that if you do, our mansion and everything in it will disappear with me. Then when I am gone, you would have to wear iron sandals, carry a steel staff and go perhaps to the ends of the earth to find me. You would have to wear out your iron sandals and have nothing but the handle of your steel staff left in your hand before you could have an inkling as to where I might be.'

The queen came in again and took her youngest daughter to the tournament. 'Today is the last day, there will be a feast after the contest, we'll have a gay time,' the queen said.

The drums and bagpipes blasted away and people poured into the arena. The youngest daughter was back in the royal balcony watching the contest with her sisters. They saw a Black Rider thunder into the arena and rein in before the king. The Black Rider bowed and said: 'May the king live long, there are a thousand men here, I will play against all of them.'

'Very well, let it be a thousand men against one,' said the king.

All eyes were on the Black Rider. He had clubbed his brothers-in-law so hard that they had spent sleepless nights worrying about the third match and every bone in their bodies ached. Their knees shook as they watched the Black Rider getting ready for the contest. He tore through the ranks of the warriors massed against him, swinging his black mace, and knocked the men off their horses, one man against a thousand men. His brothers-in-law got another beating and fled with the other players.

Habermany's wife laughed out loud, which made her sisters so angry they struck her. 'Go ahead and laugh! Where is your husband? Why isn't he here fighting like a man, instead of hiding in a crack in the wall? The Snake!'

'Snake, Snake, that's all you can say! The Black Rider is my husband!' she blurted out. 'The White Rider, the Red Rider, the Black Rider, they are all the same warrior I married, the Serpent Prince.'

The Black Rider rode up to the king and said: 'O my king, I promised to tell you my name, and to be your guest in three days. But you shall not see me any more. Your youngest daughter will tell you why.'

And he was gone in a flash. They saw the dust kicked up by his fiery

Habermany, the Serpent-Prince

horse, but not the rider, who changed into a black cloud and disappeared in the sky.

His wife burst into tears.

The players, the spectators, all left the arena and went home.

The king and queen went into the palace with their daughters. The youngest princess told her father between sobs what the Serpent Prince told her about himself. 'Three more days, and he would have been free of the spell that was cast upon him and made him a Snake. He told me repeatedly not to reveal his secret. But my sisters kept bragging about their husbands and scolding me for marrying a Snake. I could no longer endure their contempt.'

'Oh, I could break your neck!' said the king. 'Couldn't you keep your mouth shut for three more days?'

She did not stay for dinner. She went home, and saw that the mansion, the garden with its marble pools, and all their possessions had vanished, and the old man and his wife sat crying in their old shack.

She sobbed aloud. The next morning she went to the smith's and said: 'Master Markar, make a pair of iron sandals for me, and a steel staff. I have to go on a long journey. I will pay you well.'

They were ready for her the next day. The king's youngest daughter dressed like a dervish, wore her iron sandals, took her steel staff, kissed the hands of the old couple and bid them farewell. Then she went back to the palace, bowed to the king and said:

'I will go find my husband if I can. I will do what he told me.'

The king and the queen, her sisters pleaded with her not to go. They thought she would forget the Serpent Prince, but nothing they said could make her change her mind. She kissed the hand of the king, she kissed the hand of the queen. She pressed the hands of her sisters, and said: 'Farewell, I am going.'

The king said: 'Go, my daughter, and may God be with you.'

Heaven only knows how far she travelled until she reached a castle made of bricks. She saw a maiden running to a spring with two clay pitchers in her hands.

'Oh, dear maiden, tell me please, have you seen Habermany?' she asked her.

'No, no, Habermany is not here, go to the Crystal Castle,' said the maiden as she drew water from the spring.

The poor woman took to the road again. Her iron sandals and steel staff clanged across mountain-peaks and rang in rocky gorges until, at

Apples of Immortality

last, she reached the Crystal Castle. She saw the same maiden running to a spring with two crystal pitchers in her hands.

'Oh, dear maiden, tell me please, have you seen Habermany?'

'Habermany is not here, go to the Copper Castle.'

It took her a full year to reach the Copper Castle, and she saw the same maiden running to a spring with two copper pitchers in her hands.

'Oh, dear maiden, tell me please, is Habermany in this castle?'

'No, the man you are looking for is not here. Go to the Iron Castle.'

She kept going until she reached the Iron Castle, and she saw the same maiden running to a spring with two iron pitchers in her hands.

'Oh, dear maiden, tell me please, is Habermany in this castle?'

'No, no, Habermany is not in this castle, go to the Steel Castle.'

The poor woman continued to climb the towering crags until she reached the Steel Castle, and she saw the same maiden running to a spring with two steel pitchers in her hands.

'Oh, dear maiden, tell me please, is Habermany in this castle?'

'No, no, Habermany is not in this castle, go to the Silver Castle.'

It took her a full year to reach the Silver Castle, and she saw the maiden running to a spring with two silver pitchers in her hands.

'Oh, dear maiden, tell me please, is Habermany in this castle?'

No, no, Habermany is not in this castle, go to the Gold Castle.'

The poor woman travelled another year before reaching the Gold Castle. By now she had worn down her iron sandals, and she saw that only the handle of her steel staff was left in her hand. She sat down, exhausted, in the shade of a green pomegranate tree beside a cool, clear spring. 'I can't take another step,' she said to herself. 'My husband must be here.'

A thousand thoughts crossed her mind. She saw the same maiden coming to this spring with two gold pitchers in her hands.

'Oh, dear maiden, tell me please, is Habermany in this castle?'

'Yes, yes, he is in this castle. You can see I am worn out carrying water for Habermany. It has been three years now that Habermany has been crying for water to cool off, but we haven't been able to put out the fire blazing in him. He cries day and night, "I am burning with my love for the king's daughter!" And we have been pouring cold water on him day and night. But it doesn't do any good. Habermany will marry me when he gets over this burning love he has for the king's daughter, the devil take her. She betrayed his secret, and he came to the Gold Castle to stay with us.'

'My dear maiden, I have a talisman that will cure Habermany's ail-

ment. Let me drink some of the water in that pitcher before you pour it on him. He will get well, you'll see.'

The maiden took her for a dervish and gave her one of her gold pitchers to drink from. She did not see the king's daughter take the ring off her finger and drop it in the pitcher before she handed the pitcher back to her. The maiden returned to the Gold Castle.

'Why are you late? What have you been doing all this time?' her mother, a witch, screamed at her.

'I met a dervish at the spring and talked with him. He said he has a talisman to cure Habermany.'

As soon as the maiden poured this water on Habermany he said: 'I feel refreshed, I am all right now.' She did not see Habermany pick up the ring when it dropped out of the pitcher and hide it. It was his wife's wedding ring.

'Bring that dervish here, I want to see him,' said the witch, as Habermany began to dress. She suspected the dervish was Habermany's wife. The maiden went back to the spring and brought the dervish to the castle.

Habermany glanced at the iron sandals the dervish wore and saw they were full of holes. And the steel staff, he noticed, was worn down to the length of a man's palm. He was so excited he didn't know what to do.

The witch turned on the dervish: 'You shameless woman! I know who you are. You cannot deceive me. For three years, day and night, I have been pouring cold water on my nephew to cool him off—all because of you. Oh, I could tear you to pieces! Now that he saw you he got well.'

'Auntie, leave her alone,' said Habermany. 'I will send her back the way she came.'

'And you will go away with her, is that it? I'll skin her alive before I let her take you away from us!'

'I said, "Leave her alone."'

'Shut up. You stay out of this.'

When the witch and her daughter went to the garden to pick vegetables for their supper, and Habermany was alone with his wife he said: 'I am so glad you found me! My soul was seared with my love and longing for you. I came to this castle and fell into the clutches of this old witch. We've got to get out of here!'

The old witch ordered the princess to go to her sister's house and fetch a rolling pin. 'Tell my sister I need it for baking cakes for my daughter's wedding. I'll go out with my daughter to gather some firewood.'

When the witch and her daughter were out gathering firewood, Habermany said to his wife:

Apples of Immortality

'Even if you reach her sister's house she will gobble you up. She is another witch.'

'What shall I do then? She will kill me if I don't go.'

'You must do this. On your way to her sister's you will have to cross a muddy, filthy stream. Drink from it and say, "Ah, this is the water of immortality!" The stream will part at once and let you pass. You will next run into a thicket of thorns. Pluck a thistle-blossom, smell it, and say, "Ah, this is the flower of immortality!" The thorns will let you pass. Then you will see a wolf and a ram guarding the road. The wolf will have a pile of hay before it, the ram will have a fat sheeptail. You must put the hay before the ram, the meat before the wolf, and they too will let you pass. Then you must enter a closed door, and close an open door. When you enter her house you will see the rolling pin hanging on the door. You tell her, "Auntie wants the rolling pin for her daughter's wedding." She will say, "Sit down, my dear, and eat something before you go back." She will serve you fried eggs, and then step out to whet her teeth. That's when you must grab the rolling pin and run as fast as you can. She will scream after you. Don't stop, don't look back. Just keep running.'

And this is what the king's daughter did. The witch's sister served her fried eggs, and as soon as she stepped out of the room to whet her teeth, the king's daughter snatched the rolling pin hanging on the door and ran as fast as her feet would carry her. The witch ran after her tearing her hair and screaming, 'Doors, stop the thief!'

'Why should we?' the doors said. 'We are sick and tired of being always shut or open. Let her go.'

'Ram, stop her!'

'Why should I?' said the ram. 'I was starved. I am enjoying this hay.'

'Wolf, stop her!'

'Why should I?' said the wolf. 'I can't be bothered, I am eating my dinner.'

'Thorns, thistles! Stop the thief!'

'Why should we? We are not thistles and thorns, we are flowers of immortality.' And they let her pass without a scratch.

'Muddy, filthy stream, stop the thief!'

'Why should I? It's so pleasant to be the water of immortality.' And again, the stream parted at once and let her pass.

The witch gave up the chase on the bank of the stream and turned back.

Habermany, the Serpent-Prince

The princess got back to the Gold Castle and gave the rolling pin to Habermany. 'I could never have made it if you hadn't told me what to do,' she said.

When the witch saw her back alive, she said to herself: 'I will roast her in the oven before he teaches her other tricks.'



The old hag and her daughter took their ropes and went out to fetch more firewood.

'They will throw you into the oven and burn you alive, if we don't get out of here fast,' said Habermany. He burnt a hair from the tail of his White horse, and instantly the White horse came to him. Habermany put on his white clothes, took his mace, and said: 'We'll take a block of salt, a bottle of water and a comb with us.' He swung his wife up onto the splendid saddle and was gone in a flash. They were out of sight by the time the witch and her daughter returned to the castle with two more loads of firewood.

'Go after them and bring them back!' the witch ordered her daughter. 'I will skin her alive!'

The maiden went after him, flying like a black cloud.

'King's daughter,' Habermany said to his wife, 'look back and see if anybody is following us.'

She looked back. 'I see somebody coming after us like a black whirlwind.'

'That's the witch's daughter,' said Habermany. 'Throw the comb!'

His wife threw the comb, and it turned into a huge forest thick with bramble and thorns.

Apples of Immortality

The witch's daughter was badly scratched and bleeding as she struggled out of the forest.

'King's daughter, look back and see what happened.'

'She got out of the forest.'

'Throw the salt!'

It turned into a mountain of salt, but the witch's daughter came out of it, with the salt rubbed into her wounds. Undaunted by the pain, she continued to pursue them.

'Throw the water!' said Habermany.

It turned into a vast lake.

'King's daughter, look back and see what happened.'

'She came out of the lake, too.'

'We'd better stop here, it's no use, she will overtake us,' Habermany said, and jumped off the horse. He changed the White horse into black grapes, his wife into white grapes, and himself into an old man selling grapes by the wayside.

'Old man, did you see a man and a woman on a white horse?' asked the witch's daughter.

'How many pounds of grapes do you want?'

'I don't want to buy grapes. I asked you if you saw a man and a woman on a White horse. Are you deaf? Can't you hear?'

'It will cost you two coppers a pound.'

She spat, and turned back.

They resumed their own shapes, remounted and fled.

The witch asked her daughter: 'You didn't catch them, what happened?'

'I saw only an old man selling grapes by the wayside, so I turned back.'

'That was Habermany! You should have bought some grapes from him, black or white, and ruined his talisman. That would have made him come back and marry you. Go back and buy the grapes.'

The maiden raced furiously after them.

Habermany said to his wife: 'King's daughter, look back and see if anybody is following us now.'

She looked back and said: 'I see another whirlwind coming, raising clouds of dust.'

Again she threw the comb, and the witch's daughter came out of the thorny forest, scratched and bleeding. She threw the block of salt, and saw her coming out of the salt mountain. She threw the water, and saw

her coming out of the lake. Habermany turned himself into a gardener, his wife and horse into pumpkins.

The witch's daughter came up and asked: 'Did you see a man and a woman on a white horse?'

'It's a copper a pound.'

'I said, did you see a man and a woman on a white horse?'

'That's the price. I can't sell my pumpkins cheaper.'

She spat again and turned back.

Habermany let his White horse go and burned the hair of the Red horse. The Red horse came to him, and he changed into his red clothes, swung his wife up on the saddle, and fled.

The witch's daughter returned to the Gold Castle and her mother asked her: 'Where are they? What happened?'

'I couldn't find them. I met another man, a gardener, selling pumpkins by the wayside.'

'Oh, I could break your neck! That was Habermany again! Why didn't you buy some pumpkins from him? It would have ruined his talisman, and he would have come back and married you.'

'I'll capture them this time,' said the witch's daughter.

'He is now riding his Red horse.'

The witch's daughter flew after them.

'King's daughter, see if anybody is following us.'

'I see a black storm cloud coming.'

'Throw the comb!'

The princess saw the witch's daughter come out of the thorny forest; come out of the salt mountain; come out of the lake. Habermany got off his horse, transformed his wife and horse into sheep, and himself into a shepherd.

'Brother shepherd, did you see a man and a woman on a Red horse?'

'I haven't seen anybody for years. Travellers don't often use this road.'

She spat and turned back.

Habermany let the Red horse go, burned a hair from the tail of the Black horse. The Black horse came to him. He wore his black clothes, swung his wife up on the saddle, and fled again.

'What did you do, where are they?' the witch asked her daughter.

'I couldn't find them. I saw only a shepherd with his sheep.'

'You fool, that was Habermany, and he is now riding his Black horse, the fastest horse he has. You stay home, I'll go after them myself, and I'll skin her alive. I won't let them get away. I know all his tricks.'

Apples of Immortality

Habermany said to his wife: 'Look back once more and see if anybody is following us now.'

'I see somebody coming like a cyclone, blowing the rocks off the road.'

He glanced back over his shoulder and saw sky and earth mixed together in a whirlpool of dust and clouds. 'That's the old witch herself, the devil take her. She is too fast even for my Black horse.'

[Habermany turned his horse into a rose bush, his wife into a long stick planted in the middle of the bush, and himself into a snake coiled around it.]

The old witch came up like a streak of fire and screamed in her rage: 'Habermany, you ungrateful wretch, we took you in and fed you and took care of you, and this is how you repay us for our kindness. I am not like my daughter. You can't fool me. I know all your tricks. You won't get away this time. I'll crush your head.'

As she bent down to pick up a rock, Habermany bit her in the neck, and the old witch dropped dead.

Habermany and his wife changed back to their human forms, and were free at last. Habermany rode back to the king's city with his wife, and went straight to the shack where the old childless couple lived. They were beggars again and they had been crying for him and his bride every day. Now, as the old couple embraced them, they cried for joy. As soon as the king heard his youngest daughter was back with her husband he came over to greet them with tears of joy in his eyes. He saw that the Serpent Prince in his human form was the handsomest prince in the whole kingdom. The king pleaded with them to live in his palace, but they wanted to stay with the old couple.

That night Habermany himself went to the snake hole and spoke to the young mistress below. By next morning the shack was a seven-story mansion again, glittering with gold and silver and gems, with a pleasure-garden and marble pools, and everything was as before the tournament, to the astonishment of their neighbours and all the people in the city, who were very glad to see them back and rejoiced in their good fortune.

The king gave a new wedding feast for them, which lasted for seven days and seven nights. The king's daughter bore Habermany many children. The old couple spent their remaining years in ease and comfort, and died an honourable death.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

HALVA-VENDOR

There was and there was not a rich and mighty king who was still single when he said to himself: 'I had better go and see how my people live. I want to know how my subjects are getting along during my reign. Are not the poor crushed under the heels of the rich, are not the weak oppressed by the strong?'

The king turned his throne over to his vizier for two months to rule in his stead, while he himself toured his kingdom disguised as a dervish. One day the young king was a guest in the home of a tribal chieftain and fell in love with the man's pretty sister as soon as he laid eyes on her. He refused to eat with his host—a great offence in those days—until the proud chieftain promised to give him his sister in marriage.

The king married the maiden and lived with her for two months. Then he remembered his throne, that he had a kingdom to rule, and said to his wife: 'I am sorry, my dear, but I will have to leave you and go away.'

'But how can you?' she cried. 'I am with child. Who will take care of our child when you are gone?'

He took a gold armband from his pocket and gave it to his wife. 'Take this armband, and sell it in the bazaar if our child is a girl. You will get a good price for it, I am sure. If our child is a boy, sew it on the right sleeve of his shirt and send him after me.'

'But I don't even know where you are from. Where shall I send him?' she cried.

'Just tell him his father was a dervish from Ispahan and his name is Abbas.'

The king embraced his wife, bid her farewell, and returned to his own city.

Seven months later his wife gave birth to a boy.

The chieftain rejoiced in the birth of his sister's child and said: 'I have no son of my own. I shall make him my heir, bring him up as my own son, and leave him everything when I die.'

Apples of Immortality

Other boys grew by the year, but this strong, good-looking lad, being the son of a king, grew by the day. At ten years of age he had the stature and proud bearing of a prince. One day while playing knucklebones with boys in the neighbourhood he quarrelled with one of them and took his knucklebones away from him. The boy complained to his mother, and she gave the proud, handsome lad a tongue-lashing for his offence.

'How dare you rob a poor orphan boy of his knucklebones, you bastard? First find out who your father was before you talk so big and act so high and mighty with my son.'

'I am not a bastard!' the boy protested. 'I live with my own father and mother. My father is the chief of our clan, don't you know?'

'Your father was nothing but a wandering dervish,' said this heartless woman. 'The chief is only your uncle.'

The boy ran crying to his mother. 'Mother, where is my father? Whose son am I? Why do our neighbours call me a bastard?'

And his mother told him about his father, that she was the wife of a man from Ispahan whose name was Abbas. 'Your father,' she said, 'was a dervish and had to go back to Ispahan before you were born.'

'Then I will go to Ispahan to find my father,' the boy said.

His mother did not want him to go, not yet, but he would not listen to her pleas and insisted he must go to find his father. So she took the gold armband her husband gave her and sewed it on the right sleeve of her son's shirt. 'Go, my son, and may God be with you,' she said, and sent him off to Ispahan.

It was a long way to Ispahan, and in a certain city the boy met a merchant who on learning he was an orphan with no place to stay, said: 'I'll be glad to adopt you as my son and try to be a good father to you.'

The man took the boy home with him. After the rite of adoption the boy lived in this city with his foster parents, who had no children of their own, and everyone who saw this good-looking, bright, well-mannered lad sang his praises. The merchant himself loved the boy as though he were his own true lawful son.

One day some time later the merchant had to leave town and be away for two months to buy merchandise for his shop. The boy took care of his shop during the man's absence. The merchant's wife had designs on the boy, as she was still young and was married to a man much older than herself. She did not care for her elderly husband and longed for the love of a handsome youth like their adopted son. One evening she called the lad to her room and said: 'Let's kill my husband when he gets back, divide his goods between us, and live as man and wife.'

The woman made all kinds of promises and threats. The boy said he would think it over and would give her his answer the next day. He went to the shop that same night, took a small sum of money from a drawer and left a note for the merchant before leaving for Ispahan.

When the merchant came home and saw the boy was gone he questioned his wife about it.

'I don't know where he went,' she said. 'I haven't seen him for two months.'

The merchant hurried to his shop to see if anything was missing, and found the note in a drawer. 'My dearest sweet father,' he read, 'I have to leave you and go away because I do not wish to dishonour your name and your home when you have been so very kind to me. I can no longer live in the same house with mother. I am taking this money for my travelling expenses. Forgive me. Do not blame me. I love you. Farewell.'

The man's world collapsed about him. Home, wife, business—meant nothing to him any more.

'So this is what you have been up to!' he said to his wife. 'Get out!'

He paid no attention to her tears and excuses and threw her out of his house.

Let us now turn to the lad who would not dishonour this good merchant. He reached Ispahan, and walking along a street, paused before a sweet-shop and watched the owner make halva. People ate it piping hot, and the man did a brisk business selling his candy. He offered the boy a piece of halva. 'If you don't have money you don't have to pay for it,' the man said. 'Eat it and go.'

'No, thank you, I am not hungry. But I am a stranger here. I have no place to stay and I need a job. Could you let me work for you as an apprentice?'

The man liked the boy's looks, and felt sorry for him. 'All right. I'll teach you my trade. Some day you can make a good living at it.'

The boy learned to make such tasty halva and became so popular with the customers that the owner of the shop decided to turn the business over to him. 'Son, run it the way you like,' the man said. 'I am retiring. From now on this shop is yours.'

The business continued to prosper. The shop was always crowded with customers. Other halva-makers in Ispahan muttered complaints. 'This young fellow is driving us out of business!' 'He is depriving us of our livelihood!'

The king's vizier had a daughter famed for her beauty. One day one of her maids said to her: 'I saw a lad in a halva-shop who will please you



very much. You won't look at another man and you will forget to eat and drink when you see him.'

The next day the vizier's daughter went out with her forty maids-of-honour to see this halva-vendor, and fainted when she saw him as she passed his shop.

'I am going to marry this lad no matter what happens, I cannot live without him!' said the princess when she came to. She went quietly home, gathered her maids around her and told them: 'Girls, if any of you can find a way of bringing that lad to my rooms I will reward you with your weight in gold.'

'My father cleans and repairs the city's canals and I think he can dig a secret tunnel from here to the halva-shop,' one of her maids said.

'Then I want to talk to your father! If he can do that, I'll keep my promise and you will get your weight in gold.'

The maid ran to her father and told him about it. The man came over and assured her mistress it could be done. The tunnel was dug in three nights. And on the last night the maid acting as a go-between entered the shop through a trap-door. The halva-vendor was startled when he saw her.

The maid took his hand and said: 'Don't be afraid, young master, I am not a ghost or the devil. I came to take you to my mistress, the vizier's daughter.'

Well, what could the fellow do? He had to go. As soon as the vizier's daughter saw the halva-vendor she fell on his neck and took him to her

bedroom. And from that day on the halva-vendor was in the vizier's mansion every night with his sweetheart.

The complaints of other halva-vendors in Ispahan against this shop-owner reached the king's ears, and the king decided to investigate. He took his vizier with him, and disguised as dervishes, they went to the halva-shop just as the youth was preparing to go to the vizier's house. They asked for a night's lodging, and the youth served them a good supper, meanwhile wondering how he could get away from them to keep his tryst with his sweetheart. 'Well, let them sleep here if they want to,' he said to himself. 'I don't want to be rude to a couple of poor dervishes. I'll go anyway.' But he was delayed, talking with his guests, and the maid crawled in through the trapdoor.

'Why are you late? Aren't you coming tonight? My mistress is waiting for you,' she said.

The vizier recognized the maid, and turned pale.

'I won't be able to come tonight, I have guests,' said the young halva-vendor.

The maid went away, and came back a half hour later. 'My mistress says you can bring your guests with you.'

Not wishing to hurt the feelings of his guests, he invited the two dervishes to go along with him, and they followed him through the secret tunnel to the vizier's mansion at the other end. The vizier's blood froze in his veins. You could have stuck a knife into his heart without drawing a drop of blood.

'Dervish papas,' said his beautiful daughter, 'you are men after all. I have forty maids here. Have your choice.'

They said they only wanted a room to pray in.

As soon as the king and his vizier were alone, the vizier sighed and said: 'To think that I should see all of this with my own eyes, in my own house! We must try them tomorrow, and let me be the judge.'

The king, it is true, felt sorry for the two lovers, but he could not refuse his vizier's request and agreed to let him preside at their trial. The two men slipped out of the mansion while the young halva-vendor was closeted with his sweetheart.

Early the next morning the halva-vendor was summoned to the palace, and he suspected at once that the two dervishes had something to do with this summons. When he entered the courtroom he saw the vizier seated on the king's throne, with the king standing beside him, and he suspected trouble.

A little later the vizier's daughter was brought into the courtroom,

Apples of Immortality

pale, trembling, scarcely able to stand on her feet. The vizier raged at her from the king's throne: 'You are no longer my daughter! You dishonoured your father's name; you trampled upon it! I sentence you to be shot. As for this scamp, this hoodlum of a halva-vendor, it's death at the stake for him!'

The king was stunned by the verdict, but he could not intervene, for by his own order the vizier was appointed to be the presiding judge at this trial. As the two lovers were led out of the courtroom the king dried his eyes with his handkerchief.

Before impaling the halva-vendor on the stake the guards tore off his clothes—and saw the royal armband on his right sleeve. They ran to the king and told him about it. 'It's the same gold armband you lost years ago!' they cried with excited voices.

'Bring him back at once!' the king ordered, and when the halva-vendor was led back to the courtroom the king embraced his son with tears of joy, and turning to the vizier ordered him to step down from the throne. The king was so angry with the vizier that he condemned him to be banished forever from his kingdom. The vizier's daughter also was released by the king's order, and the wedding of his son to the beautiful princess was celebrated for seven days and seven nights, with the whole city of Ispahan rejoicing in their good fortune.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

SLANDERED SISTER

There was once a very rich merchant who had two armed guards standing at the gate of his princely mansion and five banners flying over it. After his wife's sudden death his two children, a boy and a girl, were left without a mother's care. The merchant engaged a tutor and gave them a good education. A special room was set aside in the mansion for the children's lessons. And brother and sister became so attached to each other that they were inseparable.

One day after the merchant led his caravan back from Istanbul, he called his son, named Simon, to his bedside and said:

'I am dying, my lad. The end has come for me, too. I leave you a great fortune. As you know I am very rich. But if you stay idle, you will become a poor man in two years. It would be easy to squander all this wealth. I worked hard to earn it. I expect you to follow in my footsteps and to take over my business interests in Istanbul and other cities. When you go to Istanbul be sure to see my friend Petros Aga. Petros and I are like brothers. He will help you sell your merchandise and assist you in other ways.'

The old merchant passed away and the funeral service was sung for his soul, and alms were distributed to the poor. After weeks of mourning Simon said to his sister: 'I can't stay home doing nothing, you know. I have to go to work. I have to buy, sell, keep busy, as father wanted me to do. I am leaving for Istanbul in a few days.'

'But how can I live here alone without you?' she cried. 'You know I can't stay away from you even for an hour.'

'It can't be helped, I have to go,' he said.

The girl was in tears. Simon engaged a servant for his sister, a good reliable God-fearing woman, he thought, so that his sister wouldn't be alone in the house during his absence. And before he led his father's caravan to Istanbul he gave his sister his picture, and she gave him her picture. On reaching the big city Simon went directly to Petros Aga's

shop in the bazaar. He told Petros Aga his father had died and he had to carry on the family business. Petros Aga broke down and wept. He had no children of his own, and he and his wife were glad to have a fine up-standing handsome young man like Simon live with them like an adopted son.

Petros Aga was very rich himself and a personal friend of the king. When he went to the royal palace for an audience with the king, he took Simon with him. The youth kissed the hand of the king, who said he knew his father well and was glad to see his son. The king's only son took a liking to Simon, and they became fast friends. Simon spent most of his time in the palace with the young prince, and was his dinner guest almost every day.

One day about a month later Simon said to Petros Aga: 'Uncle Petros, I don't know how proper it would be, but I feel I should invite the prince to dinner. I have been enjoying his hospitality for a month. He may consent to dine with us.'

'An excellent idea!' said Petros Aga. 'I will make all necessary preparations.'

Simon mustered enough courage to ask the prince to dinner.

'I cannot come without my father's consent,' said the prince. 'I will have to ask him first. I will come gladly if he says yes.'

The prince told his mother of the invitation, and she asked the king for him. 'He may go,' said the king, 'but I don't want my son to stay out all night.'

Petros Aga had the streets between his mansion and the royal palace covered with costly carpets, and the prince arrived with Simon and the vizier, and with two palace guards walking in front of him and two guards behind him. Petros Aga served them a royal dinner, sparing no expense. The prince enjoyed his visit very much, and when it was time for him to go home he asked for permission to leave.

'Why don't you sleep in our house, tonight?' Simon urged his friend. And willy-nilly the prince agreed to stay. The two youths told jokes and laughed until bedtime.

The crown prince, the vizier, and Simon went to bed in the same room. The picture of a beautiful girl hanging on the wall attracted the attention of the prince, and of the vizier too, and they saw how Simon glanced at it when they undressed. They said nothing, but that picture kept the prince awake all night.

The next morning two of the guards from the palace poured the water

Slandered Sister

as the prince washed, and helped him dress. He looked sad and thoughtful, not inclined to talk.

'Brother, what happened? You were so cheerful yesterday. Did I do or say something to displease you?' Simon asked him.

'I know of your sincere regard for me,' said the prince. 'I know that you love me like your own brother. But I didn't know you had secrets from me.'

'I have no secrets from you,' Simon said indignantly.

'Then why haven't you told me about that girl whose picture hangs in your bedroom? A very beautiful girl, I must say. I saw how you looked at the picture last night. If she means so much to you, I will do anything I can to help you marry her, even if it costs me my whole kingdom. But I won't speak to you again if you are going to have secrets from me.'

'But she is my sister!' said Simon.

And right at that moment his love for Simon's sister blazed in the heart of the prince. He did not care to eat his breakfast, he just drank a cup of tea, and rose to go. The vizier was smitten too. Simon saw them off.

The prince returned to the palace a sick boy. His mother put him to bed, but he would not tell her what ailed him. She informed his father, and the king hastened to his son's bedside with all his viziers and princes. The royal physicians were puzzled by the boy's illness, and did not know how to treat it. The patient got worse. Everybody was worried. The prince was the idol of Istanbul and the whole city was grief-stricken and impatiently waited for the latest news of his illness. There were all kinds of rumours. Some said the prince was poisoned. Others said he had merely caught a bad cold.

His mother stayed by his bedside day and night. She said: 'You were in perfectly good health yesterday when you went to your friend's house for dinner. Why don't you tell us what happened?'

The prince spoke at last: 'Mother, I shall kill myself if I can't marry Simon's sister.'

'Son, you are a king's son, and she is only a merchant's daughter. Aren't you ashamed to marry a commoner? What will your father say? What would people think? As if there weren't any royal princesses for you to marry.'

'Mother, she is the only girl for me. I know I cannot live without her.'

Apples of Immortality

She went to the king and said: 'Your son is in love with Simon's sister and threatens to kill himself if he cannot marry her.'

'How can you expect me to humiliate myself by asking for the hand of a merchant's daughter? That would be a most disgraceful thing for a king to do.'

'That's what I told him myself,' said the queen.

Simon and Petros Aga were summoned to the palace.

'My son is in love with your sister and wants to marry her. Does this meet with your approval?' the king asked Simon.

Simon and Petros Aga thought the king was joking.

'I am not joking,' the king said. 'The words I spoke came straight from my heart.'

'Your son is my best friend,' said Simon. 'Take my sister as my gift to the crown. I give her gladly.'

The prince got well.

The king proclaimed a holiday and ordered his subjects to celebrate his son's recovery and forthcoming marriage. Everybody was happy, except the vizier. The vizier was determined to prevent this marriage, and with Simon out of his way, he thought he could marry the girl himself. He said to the king: 'She is a common tramp. I hear she has had at least twenty lovers.'

The king was furious. He sent for Simon and Petros Aga to demand an explanation. 'I will have you hanged for deceiving me! You expect my son to marry a slut? You knew what she was when you gave your consent.'

They were stunned, speechless.

'May the king live long,' Simon said at last, 'if my sister is such a bad woman, hang me! But if it is all a lie, then I hope you hang her slanderer!'

Simon and Petros Aga signed a statement dictated by the king. It was the gallows for both of them if the accusation proved to be true. The king agreed to investigate.

'Give me thirty days and I will prove it,' the vizier said. 'And hang me if I lied.'

The vizier mounted his horse and rode off to see Simon's sister.

'Who are you?' the guards at the gate asked him.

'A friend of your master from Istanbul. I have a letter from him for his sister.'

'There is a man here at the gate who wants to see you,' the guards

Slandered Sister

said to their mistress. 'He came from Istanbul to give you a letter from your brother.'

'Don't let him in until I see the letter. My brother told me to be very careful and not to admit any strangers.'

The guards gave her the letter. She read it and said: 'This letter wasn't written by my brother. Give it back to that man and tell him to go away. If he tries to set foot in this house, he will be a dead man.'

The vizier was sorely disappointed, and tried another trick. He bribed her servant. The old woman denied her God as she pocketed a handful of gold coins and promised to bring him a token from her mistress, which the vizier intended to use against her.

The old woman helped her mistress with her weekly bath in the marble pool. As the girl undressed, she took off her ring and placed it on her clothes, and asked the servant to take them away. The old woman brought her clothes after the girl had her bath, but she slipped the ring into her own pocket. And somehow the girl forgot to wear her ring after her bath. It never occurred to her the old woman might steal it.

The ring was worth a king's ransom and the vizier was very happy to have it. He rewarded the servant with another handful of gold coins, and raced back to Istanbul.

The next day Simon's sister noticed that her ring was missing. She turned the house upside down but could not find it. The old woman would not confess her theft and swore to high heaven she was innocent. The girl suspected that the stranger had something to do with the disappearance of her ring.

The vizier gave the stolen ring to the king and said: 'I told you what she is, but you would not believe me. Well, I made love to her, and she gave me this ring as a token of her love and affection for me.'

Simon and Petros Aga were summoned to the palace and the king received them in the great council chamber. He handed the ring to Simon and asked: 'Is this your sister's ring?'

Simon looked at it carefully and said: 'Yes, my king, this is my sister's ring.'

'Then I will hang you both for deceiving me! Your sister gave this ring to my vizier with other favours she bestowed upon him, as he expected she would. To the gallows, both of you!'

'May the king live long,' said Simon, 'grant us five days before you hang us.'

'Very well, I grant you five days.'

Simon drove home with Petros Aga in a fast, black carriage, and both

Apples of Immortality

men were dressed in black. The two guards at the gate were happy to see their master back, but he would not go into the house and said: 'Tell my sister to come out, I have something important to tell her.'

She came out of the house and ran to the carriage to embrace her brother, but he would not even look at her. 'For shame!' he cried, and spat in her face. Then the two men drove off without saying another word.

She connected one thing with another and knew she had to move fast to save her brother. She hurried to the bazaar and bought another ring like the one that was stolen from her; the most expensive ring she could buy. She appealed to the great influential men in the city, and they signed a statement vouching for her reputation and character. Then she got into a carriage and told the driver: 'Drive me to Istanbul as fast as you can.'

She left the carriage on the outskirts of the city, paid the driver, pulled her long silk mantle over her head, and entered an Armenian church. She stood beside a woman who was weeping as she prayed, and she asked her: 'Why are you crying?'

'They will hang my husband tomorrow with a merchant's son who has been living with us, all because of the boy's sister, a shameless hussy. I am Petros Aga's wife. Everybody knows my husband.'

'My good woman, I don't know a soul in Istanbul. I've only just got here. May I stay with you tonight?'

'A traveller is God's guest.'

And that night, in Petros Aga's mansion, his wife sobbed out the full story to Simon's sister.

They heard the bugles the next morning. The two men who were to be hanged were led through the market-place in prison garb, with the royal decree ordering their execution pinned on their breasts. Loud wailing broke out in Petros Aga's home, and Simon's sister tried to comfort his wife, telling her God is merciful.

The girl drew her mantle around her and ran to the public square where the gallows were erected. The noose was already around her brother's neck. The vast throng made way for her as she went up to the king, who wanted to see the hanging with his own eyes, while seated on his throne. The angry monarch saw standing before him a beautiful girl, whose face seemed familiar.

'May the king live long, I have a complaint to make,' the girl said.

'What's your complaint?'

Slandered Sister

'Please don't hang these two men until you hear my story. Then you can decide what to do with them, or with me.'

The king ordered the hangman to wait.

The girl took the new ring out of her pocket and placed it before the



king. 'I had another ring just like this one, and your vizier stole it by bribing my servant.'

'My vizier! Stole your ring!' The king couldn't believe his ears. The vizier's heart stopped beating. 'Did you steal that ring?' the king asked his chamberlain. 'Is she telling the truth?'

The vizier's knees were shaking. 'May the king live long, I don't know this girl, I never saw her before in my life.'

'You heard him!' she cried. 'He never saw me in his life, but he says he made love to me! O my king, if your vizier told you the truth about me, then I am the guilty one, and you should hang me, not two innocent men.'

The king encouraged her to go on. All his councillors and princes heard the girl with murmurs and exclamations of horror and surprise, and a hush fell over the great throng gathered in the square. The whole city had turned out to see the hanging. And Simon's sister told the king how the vizier came to her house with a false letter from her brother; how he bribed her servant to steal the ring. She took out a paper from her bosom and handed it to the king. It bore the signatures of all the great men in her city. The king read aloud: 'We can vouch for this girl's character. We do not know of a more decent, upright maiden in our city. She is blameless of any wrong. All of us hold her in high esteem.'

Apples of Immortality

The king ordered that the two prisoners be immediately released and sent to the bath-house. The vizier was strung up in their place.

The wedding of Simon's sister to the prince was celebrated for forty days and forty nights, and everybody said: 'The bride is the prettiest and wisest maiden in the world!' The whole city rejoiced in their happiness.

They attained their wish, and may you likewise attain your wish.

THERE ARE WOMEN AND THERE ARE WOMEN

A weaver and his wife lived in peace and contentment in the city of Baghdad, and people pointed to them as an example of what a truly happy marriage could be like. A light burned in their hovel all night as the weaver worked at his loom. When the king ordered a curfew and his heralds proclaimed throughout the city that all lights should be put out during curfew hours, only the weaver's light was still burning.

The king's men arrested the weaver and took him to the palace.

'How dare you disobey my orders?' the king said.

'What can I do, my king? I am a poor man and I have to work day and night to earn a living as a weaver. I have a wife to take care of.'

The king wanted to test this man's love for his wife.

'Look here, you seem to be an honest man. Tell me, for how many more years will you work as a weaver to support your wife? Why live in such poverty? Go home, kill your wife and move over to my palace. I will make you my vizier and you can eat, drink and be happy for the rest of your life.'

'I'll not trade my wife for the whole kingdom!' said the weaver. 'My wife and I are happy with our lot. We are satisfied with what God gave us. We don't mind being poor. I'd rather be a beggar than hurt my wife's little finger.'

The weaver was allowed to go home, and the king sent for the man's wife.

'You seem to be a good woman,' said the king, 'but tell me, for how many more years will you work as a weaver's wife and live in such poverty with your husband? Kill your husband, get rid of him, and I'll make you my queen. You can live in my palace with not a care in the world. What a pity that a woman like you should live in a hovel as a weaver's wife.'

Apples of Immortality

'O king, do you really mean what you said?'

'A king does not say anything he does not mean.'

'Then I will kill my husband tonight! And you will know it when you see the light in our house go off.'

The woman went home. And after they had their frugal supper her husband said: 'O my wife, I am getting sleepy.'

'Come, my husband, put your head in my lap and have some sleep before you start weaving again.'

And while her husband dozed off with his head in her lap, as was his wont, the woman turned off the light and strangled him with a rope. The king's men rushed into the house to save the weaver, but it was too late. He was dead.

The king was furious. He summoned his vizier in the middle of the night and said: 'I shall go hunting tomorrow morning. When I come back at dusk I don't want to see a single woman left alive in Baghdad. Put all of them to the sword, beginning with your own woman and not sparing even the women in my palace. I want to wipe out the female sex.' The vizier was dismayed and told his father about this shocking order of the king, and his father said:

'Don't do it, son. You just stay out of town for a few days, and I'll go have a talk with the king tomorrow evening.'

The next day the king was raging when he saw his vizier had not carried out his order and the city was still full of women. He sent for his vizier, but it was the vizier's aged father who came to the palace and asked for an audience with the king.

'Where is your son?' shouted the king. 'First I'll chop off his head, and then put the women to the sword. My army is standing by, waiting for my orders.'

The old man dropped to his knees and pleaded with the king to allow him to say a few words, and the king gave him permission to speak.

'I was, O king, the vizier of your father during his glorious reign. One day while hunting with your father I lost my way. A young mounted warrior with a hairless face, whom I took for a lad of fifteen, was bold enough to abduct me. He tied me in front of his saddle, and with my horse in tow, galloped off to a castle in the plains. He made me wait under the wall of the castle, with my hands and feet tied, and climbed the wall by driving big nails into it. About an hour later the bloody head of a man was thrown over the wall. Then I saw the fearless lad climb down the wall, and I was astonished to hear him say:

'I am a woman. This is the head of a prince who murdered my hus-

band, and I vowed to avenge my husband's death. I have dug my own grave beside my husband's. I do not care to live without my husband. So I will now kill myself. And if you love your God bury me next to my husband, with the head of this evil prince placed under our feet. You can have my horse and arms.'

'She took me to her grave, untied my hands and feet, plunged a dagger into her breast, and died before my eyes. I pulled the dagger out of her chest and buried her next to her husband. O my king, there are women and there are women. If the weaver's wife made you so angry that you ordered the massacre of all these innocent women in Baghdad, let the example of this brave devoted young wife prompt you to rescind your order.'

The king commanded that only the weaver's wife be put to death, and spared the lives of the other women in the city.



THE KING'S ROSE

There was and there was not a king who had a splendid garden with a Rose of Immortality growing in front of his palace. Every spring a worm ate the Rose just before it bloomed, and the king could never enjoy its heavenly fragrance, though he had gardeners lavish their care upon this Rose and watch it day and night.

One day a new gardener came up to him and said: 'May the king live long, let me guard the Rose and I'll catch the worm.'

'My good man, I've tried every gardener in the world, and nobody so far has been able to catch this worm, and here you come and tell me you can.'

'May the king live long, chop my head off if I don't catch the worm.'

The king hired him as his new gardener and the man watched the Rose day and night. But he fell asleep just before the Rose bloomed, and the worm came again and ate it. The gardener asked for another chance, and the king sighed:

'The worm ate the Rose, but it won't do the worm much good, the worm can't keep it; some other creature will come along and eat the worm.'

The king let the gardener watch the Rose for another year, and just as the Rose bloomed, the gardener saw the worm again. But before he could catch and kill the worm a nightingale swooped down from somewhere and flew off with the worm hanging in its beak. The Rose at last was unharmed. The happy gardener picked the beautiful flower and took it to the king.

'May the king live long, here is your Rose. Before the worm could eat it a bulbul ate the worm.'

'Yes, the bulbul ate the worm, but it won't do the bulbul much good,' sighed the king. 'Some other creature will come along and eat the bulbul.'

The next spring the gardener saw a worm coming again to eat the Rose as it bloomed, and the same nightingale swooped down and eat the

The King's Rose

worm; and all of a sudden a snake sprang out from under the bushes and swallowed both the worm and the nightingale. The happy gardener picked the rose and took it to the king.

'May the king live long, this year also a worm came to eat the Rose, and the same bulbul ate the worm, and a snake swallowed both the worm and the bulbul.'

'Well, it won't do the snake much good,' sighed the king. 'Some other creature will come along and eat the snake.'

It was the fourth year now, and the gardener kept his vigil in the king's garden. And once again the worm came to eat the Rose, the nightingale ate the worm, and the same snake sprang out from under the bushes and swallowed both the worm and the nightingale. The gardener took aim with his bow and killed the snake on the spot.

'May the king live long, the worm came to eat the Rose, a bulbul ate the worm, I saw the same snake eat both of them, and I killed the snake.'

'Good,' said the king, smelling the Rose, 'but you can't keep it either.'

The gardener wondered what the king meant by that. It worried him. One day he was pruning a tree close by the marble pool in the garden, and saw the queen come with her maids, take off her clothes and plunge into the pool. He stayed in the tree, for fear he might be seen by the queen while she bathed. She was dressing after her bath and happened to look up. She saw the gardener hiding in the tree, but said nothing. She went back to the palace and told the king. And the king became a raging lion.

'Executioners! Executioners!'

The executioners came in and bowed.

'I want you to seize my gardener and chop his head off before my eyes.'

The executioners dragged the gardener before the king, and the poor man suspected the cause of the king's fury.

'May the king live long,' he said, 'allow me to say a few words before you chop off my head.'

'These will be your last words.'

'May the king live long, do you remember what I told you when you first hired me as your gardener? I said the worm ate the Rose, and you sighed, "It won't do the worm much good, the worm can't keep it." The next year I told you a bulbul ate the worm, and you sighed, "It won't do the bulbul much good, the bulbul can't keep it." The third year a snake ate both the bulbul and the worm, and you sighed again, "It won't do the snake much good, the snake can't keep them." The fourth year I killed

Apples of Immortality

the snake that ate the bulbul and the worm, and you said, "Good, but you too can't keep it." And now, O king, may I say that you can chop my head off, but you can't keep it either !'

When the king heard these wise words spoken by his gardener, he spared the man's life.

WISE WEAVER

The king was seated on his throne when an ambassador arrived from a distant land and without saying a word drew a circle around the throne, then sat down and remained silent. The king was puzzled. He summoned his chamberlain and all his councillors and asked them what the envoy meant, but they could not give him an answer. The king felt offended. So there wasn't a single wise man among his courtiers? He gave them strict orders to find a man in his kingdom wise enough to know the answer, or he would slay them all.

The courtiers went around the city looking for such a man and happened to enter a house where they saw a cradle with a baby in it rocking by itself. There was no one else in the house. They saw the same thing in the next house: the cradle rocking by itself, and nobody in the building. They went up to the roof and saw a stick moving by itself to frighten the birds away from the grain that was washed and spread out to dry in the sun. They were amazed, and went down to the floor below, where they saw a weaver working at his loom. He had a string tied to one end of the shuttle, a string to the other end, and another string tied to the comb, and as the shuttle moved back and forth over the loom, the two cradles and the stick set on the roof for frightening the birds away moved with it. A clever weaver indeed.

'An ambassador came from another land and drew a circle around the king's throne, but refuses to speak,' they said to the weaver. 'We do not know what he means. Maybe you know. Come with us. The king will reward you well if you can solve this puzzle.'

The weaver thought it over, then taking a couple of knucklebones and a pullet with him went to the palace with the king's men. He took the knucklebones out of his pocket and threw them before the envoy, who took a fistful of millet from his pocket and scattered it on the floor. The weaver then produced the pullet from under his coat and let it eat the

Apples of Immortality

grain. The ambassador put on his sandals and departed, without saying a word.

They asked the weaver: 'What does it all mean?'

'By drawing a circle the ambassador meant his king is coming to besiege our city,' answered the weaver, 'and he wanted to know whether our king would submit or fight. When I threw my knucklebones before him I meant they should all go play with knucklebones, they are nothing but children to us, and it's foolish of them to pretend they could fight our king. By scattering the millet on the floor he meant his king has innumerable warriors at his command. When my pullet ate all the millet the ambassador understood what I meant, that one of us can slaughter a thousand such warriors.'

The king was so pleased with the weaver that he wanted to make him the new chamberlain, but the weaver preferred to go back to his loom.

'But I implore you, O King,' he said, 'not to forget that among your humblest servants there are men even wiser than your chamberlains, and I hope from now on you treat the weaver and the cobbler also as men.'



THE GOAT

There was once a peasant who had a milch goat—and that was all he owned. He and his wife lived on the milk the goat gave. One day he took his goat to the bazaar to sell it. It was morning, and he was hungry. As he came to a cookhouse and smelled the lamb stew redolent with garlic he cried out at the top of his voice: 'Goat for sale, cheap!'

'How much do you want for your goat?' the cook asked him.

'I will trade it for a bowl of lamb stew.'

The man sat down and ate the stew with great relish. Then he wiped his lips, stood up, and taking his goat started to walk away. The cook pulled him back. 'What are you doing? This goat now belongs to me. Didn't you eat my stew?'

'Are you crazy? You want to rob me of my goat for a bowl of stale stew?'

They argued, cursed each other, came to blows. A crowd gathered.

'Aren't you ashamed to be fighting in the bazaar! Break it up!' people said from all sides and tried to separate the two men.

'This scoundrel wants to take my goat away from me for a bowl of stale stew. Why, this big beautiful goat is worth at least ten silver pieces!'

The crowd sided with the peasant and blows rained on the head of the cook. The man walked off with his goat.

A little later, in another part of the bazaar, his mouth watered again as he paused before a pastry shop, and he cried again: 'Goat for sale, cheap!'

'How much do you want for your goat?' the pastry-man asked him.

'I will trade it for a cake.'

He sat down and ate a delicious cake, wiped his lips, and rose to go, taking his goat with him.

'Hey, where are you taking my goat?' the pastry-man asked.

'Your goat?'

Apples of Immortality

'You just ate my cake. The goat stays here.'

As the two men fought over the goat another crowd gathered, and it was the pastry-man who got a beating. They broke up the fight and let the peasant go on his way with his goat.

Some time later he saw a man carrying a large tray of halva on his head and crying, 'Halva! Halva!'

'Goat for sale, cheap!' shouted the peasant.

'How much do you want for your goat?' the halva-vendor asked him.

'I will trade it for a piece of halva.'

He ate the halva, and taking his goat started to walk away. The halva-vendor held him back. 'Where are you going with my goat? We just traded it. You ate my halva.'

Curses and blows followed. And again, the crowd sided with the owner of the goat and the halva-vendor got the worst of the argument as a cheat and swindler.

On his way back to his village the peasant stopped before a fine house and said to himself: 'It's getting dark. Too late to go home. I think I'll sleep here tonight.'

He knocked on the door. A young woman opened it, and told him to go away, she didn't need a goat.

'Have a heart, sister, take pity on a poor man and let me sleep in your barn. I am a stranger in this town. I'll be on my way early tomorrow morning.'

She let him go sleep in the barn. About two hours later he heard a knock on her door, and peeping out through a crack saw the cook, who quickly went into the house. About an hour later there was another knock, and he saw the pastry-man. The cook came to hide in the barn, thinking it was the woman's husband, and bumped into the peasant, who had his ear glued to the barn door.

The peasant scolded the cook in a harsh voice, 'What are you doing here?'

'Hush! Don't talk so loud. What are you doing here!'

'I am selling my goat. Want to buy it?'

'Keep quiet! I'll buy your goat if you keep your mouth shut. How much do you want for it?'

'Ten silver pieces.'

The cook counted out ten silver pieces, and the man put them into his purse.

About an hour later he saw the halva-vendor come knock on the

The Goat

woman's door, and the pastry-man ran out of the back door and came to hide in the barn, thinking it was her husband. And he too bumped into the peasant.

'What are you doing here?' he shouted at the pastry-man.

'Shhhh! Don't shout. What are you doing here?'

'I am selling my goat. Want to buy it?'

'I will buy it, if you keep quiet. How much?'

'Twenty silver pieces.'

The pastry-man paid him twenty silver pieces. About an hour later there was another knock on the door, and peeping out through his crack the peasant saw the woman's husband go in. The halva-vendor ran to the barn through the back door, and bumped into him like the others.

'Did you come to buy my goat? Or shall I sell it to her husband?'

'All right, I'll buy your goat. How much do you want for it?'

'Twenty-five silver pieces.'

The halva-vendor counted out twenty-five silver pieces and said: 'Just keep quiet, will you?'

Husband and wife had supper together and she was very sweet to him. After they finished eating, the husband got up and said: 'Wife, time to go to bed. But I'd better go take a look at the barn before we turn in.'

'It's late, you are tired, let's go to bed.'

'No, I'd better check first. I can't sleep if I worry about our cattle.'

As the husband entered the barn he knocked himself against the peasant, and was startled when a strange man told him in an angry voice to watch his step and not be so rude.

'And who are you to give me orders in my own house? What are you doing in my barn?' the irate husband wanted to know.

'I am selling a goat.'

'Selling a goat? Where do you think you are? This is not a bazaar.'

'If this isn't a bazaar what is it then? What are all these men doing here?'

'What men? What are you talking about?'

'Just light the lantern and see for yourself.'

The husband lighted the lantern and peered around. He saw the man who sold stew, the man who sold pastry, the man who sold halva, hiding among his cattle. He turned to the peasant. 'How much do you want for your goat?'

'Ten silver pieces.'

Apples of Immortality

'I will give you ten silver pieces if you clear out of here with your goat immediately, and not breathe a word about this to anyone. Remember, not a word ! Or I will kill you.'

The peasant collected from the husband also, stuffed the ten silver pieces into his bulging purse, and went home with his goat.

THE OLD HAG

There was once a poor old beggar who had a few gold pieces he had saved sewn in the rags he wore. He sat down in a quiet corner, glanced around to make sure nobody was watching him, and taking out his gold coins began to count them one by one. Then he sewed them up again.

An old woman suddenly seized him by the coat-tail and said: 'Greetings, my dear husband! I found you at last, thank heaven! Where have you been all this time?'

'The devil take you, what are you up to? I am not your husband. And I have no wife,' said the old man.

'How can you say such a thing? Of course I am your wife, and you are my dear husband!'

'I told you I am not your husband.'

'But you are my husband!'

They argued and came to blows, and were taken to court.

The judge said: 'Old man, don't you think it's time you married and settled down? Why don't you marry this woman and let her support you? She can work, if you can't.'

And so the old woman took the man to her shack.

'You can't go around wearing these filthy rags,' she said. 'Take them off. I will wash them, and give you a good bath, too.'

The old man took off his clothes, and she washed them and hung them out to dry. And while he was waiting for his clothes to dry she disappeared with his gold coins.

She turned up in another part of the city and paused before the house of a rich merchant, who was away on business. His pretty wife leaned out the window and said: 'What do you want, old woman?'

'My dear young lady, I am all alone in this town, looking for work. Do you need a servant? You don't have to pay me a copper. I'll be happy with a dry crust of bread and I promise to serve you faithfully to the end of my life.'

Apples of Immortality

The merchant's wife took her in, fed her, gave her a room to sleep in. A few days later the old hag went to the bazaar to do some shopping for her mistress. Another merchant had an eye on the young woman. He approached her servant and said: 'Let me into the house tonight, and I will pay you well for it.'

'Come at midnight. I'll open the door. Three hundred silver pieces in advance, please.'

The merchant paid her 300 silver pieces. Pocketing the money the old woman went home. At midnight there was a knock on the door. The old woman got up and opened it.

'Who is it?' her mistress called from the bedroom.

'Just an old friend of mine from my home town. Let him sleep here tonight and he will go away early in the morning.'

'I can't let a stranger sleep in my house. Impossible.'

'He can sleep in my room. Just for this one night, please.'

'All right, but your friend must leave early in the morning,' said her mistress.

The old woman took the merchant to her own room and asked him to take off his clothes. 'My mistress is expecting you,' she whispered. 'Pretend to be sleeping in my room until she is ready to receive you. You can leave your clothes here when you go to her bedroom.'

The young woman screamed when she saw a stranger enter her bedroom. 'How dare you enter my room?'

'But you told her you were expecting me,' the man said.

'Told whom?'

'Your servant. I paid her three hundred silver pieces to get in.'

'That accursed old hag will be my ruination!' She ran to her servant's room, but the old hag had already disappeared with the merchant's clothes, watch, purse, and silver belt. Neighbours were aroused from their sleep. Noise. Confusion. Angry voices. The merchant had no choice but to make his escape in his nightshirt.

The old hag was caught the next day and taken to the king's court. Her mistress, the merchant, and the old man she had swindled and who finally caught up with her, lodged a complaint against her and were present during the hearing.

The old woman saw the king had an eye on her mistress. She sidled up to him and whispered in his ear: 'May the king live long, I see you like my daughter.'

'She is the prettiest girl I ever saw.'

'She can be yours—for three hundred silver pieces.'

The Old Hag

The old woman pocketed the money the king paid her, and said: 'I'd better get out of here before my daughter runs crying after me. She is so young, you know.'

'She won't see you if you jump out of this window,' the king said.

The old woman jumped out of the window, and the king called the young lady to him and said: 'You are mine now. It's all arranged to your mother's satisfaction.'

'You mean that old hag? You took her for my mother? Ah, you don't know the tricks she has played on me and these men! That's why we came here, so that you would hear our complaints.'

'Catch that woman and bring her to me!' the king commanded.

They caught the old hag and dragged her back to the king's court. The king was so furious that he ordered his men to beat her to death. 'Put her body in a sack and throw it into the sea,' he told his men.

The sack containing her body was carried to the seashore on a mule, and before the muleteer could dump the sack into the sea, the old woman sat up and scared him nearly to death.

'Thank goodness I am not dead yet,' she sighed. 'Go and tell the king his mother is alive. You will get a big reward for it. I told my son I want to be buried in the sea when I die, but it seems my time hasn't come yet.'

The man left her with his mule and ran to the palace with the good news. 'May the king live long, your mother is alive!'

'Don't let that woman get away,' the king commanded.

By the time the king's men reached the seashore the old woman had sailed away in a boat, with the mule.

The king turned to her pretty mistress and the two men who came to court to complain against her. 'That old hag made a fool of me too,' he said, and dismissed the case.

THE LAME MAN, THE BEARDLESS MAN, AND THE ONE-EYED MAN

There was once a merchant who felt the approach of death and calling his son Martyros to his bedside said: 'My son, after I am gone you can trade anywhere you like, but let me warn you again to stay away from Aleppo.'

The old merchant died, and Martyros continued his father's business. One day he said to his mother: 'I am going to Aleppo.'

She said: 'Didn't your father warn you on his deathbed not to go to Aleppo?'

'Mother, I have to go. It's business.'

Martyros heard that boxwood fetched very high prices in Aleppo, and set out with forty mule-loads of boxwood. He travelled for many days—and heaven only knows how far he went until at last he was within sight of Aleppo. At a caravansary just outside the city some men stopped him on the road and told him all the caravansaries in Aleppo were closed for the night. 'You'd better rest here,' they said, 'and go on to the city tomorrow morning.'

Martyros let these men unload his merchandise. A Lame man came along and saw that all of it was boxwood. He stole a bundle, threw half of it into the fireplace, and piled up the rest under the divan. When the young merchant was eating his meal at the inn the Lame man came up to him and said: 'What's all that merchandise you just unloaded?'

Martyros told him it was boxwood.

'Poor man, I feel sorry for you. Why, boxwood is so cheap here we burn it, or we give it away free. Bringing boxwood to Aleppo is like taking salt to saltmines.'

The Lame man showed the young merchant the boxwood burning in

The Lame Man, the Beardless Man, and the One-Eyed Man

the fireplace, and piled up under the divan. 'God is merciful,' he said. 'I don't want you to go back to your country feeling bitter about Aleppo. I can give you seven measures of gold for your merchandise.'

Martyros accepted the man's offer. The next morning he went to the city to see the sights. 'I'd better see what Aleppo is like before I go back,' he said to himself. 'People will ask me about it.'

He wandered around, and entered a shop. 'Greetings, and my best wishes to you for your success,' he said to the owner, a friendly-looking old man.

'A thousand greetings to you, brother stranger. Where are you from?'

'From Erevan, from the village of Parbi,' said Martyros. 'By the way, do you have any boxwood for sale?'

'How much do you want?'

'Oh, about four hundred pounds.'

'Brother stranger, boxwood is so scarce here that four or five pounds is the most you could expect to buy in any shop. An ounce costs five pieces of silver.'

'Uncle, help me, I am in trouble! I have forty loads of boxwood tied up at a caravansary outside the city, where I put up last night. A Lame man came up to me—the owner of the caravansary or somebody else, I don't know—and showed me boxwood burning in his fireplace and said it's so cheap in Aleppo people use it for firewood. He offered to buy my merchandise for seven measures of gold, which will hardly cover my expenses. How can I move my merchandise out of that caravansary?'

'Son, I'm afraid it would be very difficult. They are three well-known thieves working together, and they fleece innocents like you. The Lame man operates with the Beardless man and the One-Eyed man. The only person I know who can help you is their cook. Go to him.'

The young merchant went to the cook and asked for his help. 'Help me get my merchandise back and I will pay you anything you want,' he said.

'You don't have to pay me anything,' said the cook. 'Tonight the Lame man, the Beardless man, and the One-Eyed man will consult the fortune-teller in the room next to yours. Listen through the keyhole in your room. You will know what to do after you hear the fortune-teller.'

Martyros listened through the keyhole. The Lame man, the Beardless man, and the One-Eyed man said to the fortune-teller: 'This merchant from Erevan has brought forty loads of boxwood and we'll pay him seven measures of gold for the whole lot. How much can we get for it? What will our profit be on this deal?'

Apples of Immortality

The fortune-teller said: 'Remember, this merchant is from Erevan. He knows his way around, he has done business in many cities, and he is seven times more clever and cunning than you are. Now, what would you do if he says: "I don't want seven measures of gold, give me seven measures of fleas?" Where could you find seven measures of fleas?'

'Good heavens!' they cried, 'how could he think up a thing like that?' Martyros heard it all through the keyhole.

Early the next morning he went to see the chief justice of Aleppo and said: 'I have been here ten days, and I have forty loads of merchandise



tied up at the caravansary where I am staying. Call the buyers and ask them what they are willing to pay for it, so that I can wind up my business here and go home. I have a family to look after.' And he told the magistrate who the buyers were. The magistrate summoned the *Lame man*, the *Beardless man*, and the *One-Eyed man* and asked them why they weren't paying for the merchandise they offered to buy.

'We will pay him seven measures of gold,' they said.

'I don't need any gold,' said Martyros. 'I will sell my merchandise only for seven measures of fleas.'

Well, how could these thieves catch seven measures of fleas? They could not catch so many fleas even in the poorest villages. They tried but soon gave up.

The *Lame man*, the *Beardless man*, and the *One-Eyed man* thought up another scheme. They paid an accomplice a hundred pieces of silver and gave him fine new clothes to wear, and told him: 'Follow the merchant from Erevan and learn all you can about him.'

The Lame Man, the Beardless Man, and the One-Eyed Man

When Martyros entered a tavern, this man also entered the tavern. Martyros ordered a bottle of wine with his meal, and the man watching him did the same. Then he turned to Martyros, raised his wine cup and said: 'Brother, to your good health!'

Martyros returned the toast, and the two men got acquainted. Answering the man's questions, Martyros told him about himself, his family and friends in Parbi. The man ran to the three thieves with this information.

The next day the One-Eyed man buttonholed Martyros and said: 'Greetings, my dear Martyros! How are you? How are your father and mother? How are my good friends in Parbi?' And he mentioned them by their names.

Martyros was taken aback, wondering how a stranger could know so much about his family, and friends, in Parbi.

'I always wanted to meet you,' said the One-Eyed man, 'and we've finally met, thank heaven. You know, Martyros, I was in your home on the day you were born. You had only one good eye then, so I took out my own eye and gave it to you.'

The One-Eyed man went to the chief justice of Aleppo and said: 'When Martyros of Erevan was born I was his father's servant. He had only one good eye, so I took out my other eye and gave it to him. I have done without my eye all these years, but now I need it myself. Please make him return my eye to me.'

The magistrate summoned the merchant from Erevan and questioned him about the One-Eyed man.

'He seems to know my parents, but I don't remember him, I've never met the man before,' said Martyros.

'He says one of your eyes belongs to him, and he wants it back. What do you have to say to that?'

'Let me think it over and I'll give you my answer tomorrow.'

The magistrate gave him one day to think it over. The young merchant went back to the friendly shopkeeper, and sought his help and advice, and the shopkeeper sent him back to the cook.

'Tonight they will consult the fortune-teller on their next move,' said the cook. 'Listen through your keyhole and act accordingly.'

Martyros listened, and heard the One-Eyed man say: 'The merchant from Erevan got out of the clutches of the Lame man; but now I have him in my power. Let's see what he will do about his eye.'

The fortune-teller said: 'Don't forget he is from Erevan.'

The One-Eyed man said: 'What can the poor fellow do but get out of

Apples of Immortality

Aleppo as fast as he can, to save his eye? We can have his merchandise for nothing. We won't see him again.'

'No, he won't run away,' said the fortune-teller. 'Why should he? He can say: "Very well, take out my eye—take out his eye—and weigh them. If they weigh the same, he can have both eyes."' '

And the next day that's exactly what Martyros said to the magistrate. The One-Eyed man opened the door and fled from the courtroom, and the Lame man and the Beardless man fled with him. To this day they shudder when anybody mentions the name of a merchant from Erevan.

Martyros sold his merchandise at a good price, making a handsome profit, rewarded the cook with a bale of boxwood, and returned to Erevan a richer man.

Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller of this tale, one for the listener, and one for him who heeds the teller's words.

CLEVER BRIDE

There was once a bride who lived with her mother-in-law, and was very fond of chick-peas. Every God's day she stole some chick-peas, roasted them secretly, and ate them. In about ten days half of the sack in which her mother-in-law kept the chick-peas was empty.

The old woman suspected the bride. 'I'm sure it's she,' she said to herself.

The mother-in-law was a wily old woman, but no less clever was the young bride, who knew she was being watched.

One day while sweeping the house the bride found a chick-pea. She picked it up and showed it to her mother-in-law. 'What is this, mother?' she asked.

'The poor girl is innocent, I had no right to suspect her,' the woman thought to herself. 'She doesn't even know what a chick-pea is.'

A MAN MUST STRETCH HIS LEGS TO FIT HIS QUILT

A king ordered all the tailors in his kingdom to make a quilt that would be neither too long nor too short for him. And he chopped off the heads of all the tailors who could not make a quilt of the right length to fit his size.

'May the king live long,' said a tailor, 'I can make the quilt you want.'

'Very well, you make it,' said the king, 'but remember that if it's a little too short or a little too long you lose your head. I am warning you in advance.'

'Chop off my head also if the quilt isn't of the right length.'

The tailor went back to his shop and made the quilt a little short. It was a fine quilt and he took it to the palace and spread it proudly on the king's bed, meanwhile hiding a whip under his coat.

'Let's see if it fits me,' said the king, and lying in his bed, pulled the quilt over him and stretched out his legs. His toes stuck out from under the quilt.

The tailor drew out his whip, and a stinging blow on the king's toes made him pull up his legs.

'May the king live long, this quilt is just the right length for you,' said the tailor. 'A man must stretch his legs according to the length of his quilt.'

The king kept the quilt and rewarded the tailor for his wise words.

THE LIAR

There was and there was not a king whose heralds proclaimed that whoever told the most whopping lie to the king would receive a golden apple as a reward.

Liars came from all parts of the kingdom and told him their lies, but the king did not like any of them: what they said could be true. The sons of the chamberlain and other state councillors were among these liars, but all failed to get the reward the king promised.

Finally an old beggar arrived at the palace holding a big pot. The king asked him: 'What do you want, old man?'

'May the king live long, I want my money back. You owe me a potful of gold.'

'You are lying! I don't owe you anything.'

'If you think I am lying, then give me the golden apple you promised.'

The king realized what the old beggar was up to and changed his tune. 'No, you spoke the truth,' he said.

'If I spoke the truth, then give me the potful of gold you owe me.'

Without saying another word, the king gave him the golden apple.

DEATH OF LITTLE KIKOS

Once there lived a man and his wife who had three daughters. One day while this man was working in his field his wife sent their eldest daughter to the spring to fetch some water. 'I have to knead the dough,' she said. The spring was at the bottom of a glen, shaded by a large tree. The girl filled her pitcher, then looked up at the tree, looked down with horror at the rock under it, and sighed :

'I'll marry some day and have a son and christen him Kikos. I'll make a nice lambskin cap for my boy, and one day he will come to this spring and climb this tree and fall down on this rock and be killed. Oh, woe is me, my darling Kikos, how could I be your mother and not cry?'

The girl burst into tears, and sitting under the tree bewailed the death of her son.

'The devil take her, where is your sister? I have to knead the dough to bake bread,' the mother said to her middle daughter, and sent her to the spring to see what happened. The girl found her sister crying under the tree.

'Why are you crying, dear sister?'

'My goodness, have you no feelings? What kind of an aunt are you?'

'Aunt? What do you mean?'

'I'll marry some day and have a son and christen him Kikos. I'll make a nice lambskin cap for my boy, and one day he will come to this spring and climb this tree and fall down on this rock and be killed. How could I be his mother and not cry?'

The middle daughter sat down beside her sister and the two cried together. Their mother grew impatient, waiting for them. There was no water in the house to knead the dough. She sent her youngest daughter to the spring to see what happened to her sisters. When they told her about Kikos she sobbed aloud with them. Their mother could wait no longer. She hurried down to the spring herself and screamed at her daughters :

Death of Little Kikos



'May you all go blind! What are you doing here, sitting under this tree, when I have to knead the dough and need water?'

'Oh mother dear, what kind of a grandmother are you?' the three of them wailed together. 'How can you be so heartless when your grandson is dead?'

'My grandson is dead—what are you talking about?'

Her eldest daughter tore her hair in her grief and kept saying, 'Woe is me, woe is me!' The others said between sobs:

'Oh mother dear, our sister will marry some day and have a son and we'll christen him Kikos. We'll make a nice lambskin cap for our boy, and one day he will come to this spring and climb this tree and fall down on this rock and be killed. Wouldn't you cry as his grandmother?'

She wept bitterly with her daughters: 'Oh my dear little Kikos! Oh my darling grandson!'

A man on horseback rode by the spring, saw them screaming and tearing their hair, and asked them: 'What are you crying for?'

'When our little Kikos falls down from this tree and is killed, of course we cry,' said the mother.

The man was puzzled, didn't know what the woman meant.

'Look here, my good man,' said the mother, 'my eldest daughter will marry some day and have a son and we'll christen him Kikos. We'll sew a nice lambskin cap for our boy, and one day he will come to this spring and climb this tree and fall down on this rock and be killed. How can you expect his mother, his aunts and his grandmother not to cry?' And the four of them bawled again: 'Oh our poor little Kikos, oh our darling Kikos is dead!'

Apples of Immortality

The man smiled and said: 'Your tears won't bring the boy back to life. You'd better go home and give a funeral feast for the salvation of his soul.'

They got up and went home, baked the bread, slaughtered an ox, and invited all their neighbours to the feast. The husband came home in the evening after the feast, and saw the head of the ox—the only ox he owned.

'Who slaughtered our ox?' he asked his wife and daughters.

'We gave a funeral feast in memory of our little Kikos,' they said.

'Who is Kikos? What the devil are you talking about? What has been going on here? Have you all gone crazy?'

He became furious when they told him about the death of little Kikos, but it was too late now to do anything about it. After a violent quarrel he strode out of the house, thinking to himself: 'I'd like to know whether it's only my wife and daughters who are crazy, or are there others besides them?'

As he was walking along a stream he saw a woman washing her feet.

'Where are you going, brother?' this woman asked him.

He looked at her and said nothing. The woman repeated her question. He was so annoyed that he yelled at her: 'I am going to hell!'

'My mother is in hell,' she said, 'and I want to send her some money.'

He paid no attention to the woman and walked away. She ran after him. 'My mother went to hell and she is expecting this money. Please give it to her.'

'I could buy another ox with this,' the man thought, pocketing the money. 'I was looking for a fool. Here is one who runs after me herself.'

This woman happened to be the wife of the man who rode by the spring. She went home and told her husband: 'I just sent my mother some money.'

'Are you crazy? How can you send her money? Your mother is dead.'

'I met a man going to hell and gave it to him.'

In his anger he struck his wife, and jumping on his horse went to find the man to whom she gave the money. He followed the man to a flour mill, and searched through the mill. The man escaped. His pursuer ran out into the yard and saw that his horse was gone too. The man who lost his ox rode home on the horse, intending to sell the horse to buy himself another ox.

'I thought you were the only fools around here,' the man said to his wife and daughters, 'but I see that some people are even crazier than you are.'

THREE BROTHERS

Once there was a king who lost a camel during a dreadful famine in his kingdom. His men searched far and wide but could not find the camel. The king's subjects were starving to death, and a thousand heads were smashed for a piece of bread, and even then no bread was to be had. There was a mad woman in this kingdom, and she had three sons: a ploughman, a gardener, and a weaver. These three brothers caught the camel that was running loose in their neighbourhood and hid it in their stable. They knew their mother was mad and feared she might spill it out. And so they told her she was to be married and dressed her up in her bridal clothes.

'Nanny,' they said, 'we'll invite all of our friends and relatives to your wedding feast. We'll slaughter this camel and there will be plenty of meat for everybody.'

The three brothers butchered the camel and preserved the meat in large clay jars, which they kept out of sight, knowing what would happen to them if they were found out. Then each went back to his work.

The king's men came to question the ploughman first.

'Brother, did you see a camel running loose around here?' they asked him.

'Can't you see I am ploughing my field?' He wanted the king's men to think he was mad.

'Yes, we can see you are ploughing your field, but we asked you if you saw a camel.'

'Well, it all depends, sometimes I plough two acres a day, sometimes only one acre.'

'We are asking you about a camel, a camel! With four legs, two ears, a long crooked neck.'

'There is a lot of work to be done before I can harvest my crop: ploughing, sowing, cultivating, irrigating.'

'Let's not waste any more time on this fool,' muttered the king's men among themselves, and went to question his brother, the gardener.

Apples of Immortality

The gardener too pretended to be mad.

'Did you see a camel here by any chance?'

'Are you blind, men? Can't you see I am gathering my walnut crop?'
He too made the king's men think he was mad.

'We are asking you about a camel. Did you see it or not? That's all we want to know.'

'Prices of walnuts go up and down. It's hard to figure in advance what you'll get for your crop.'

'We are asking you about a camel, a camel! Are you deaf, can't you hear?'

'My bigger trees are at the other end of the orchard. We'll shake them later.'

The king's men thought this gardener was even crazier than his brother, and went to question the weaver.

'We are looking for a camel that got lost. If you tell us where we can find it you will get a reward.'

The weaver also pretended to be completely daffy. 'Can't you see I am busy weaving?'

'We are asking about a camel that belongs to the king.'

'Well, of course, on some days I weave more cloth than on others.'

'We don't care how much cloth you weave on any one day, all we want to know is whether you saw a camel.'

'The price varies. Sometimes I get a silver piece, sometimes two silver pieces for the same bolt of cloth.'

The king's men said among themselves: 'This fellow is even crazier than his brothers. Let's question their mother. She might tell us the truth.'

They found the mother standing in a street corner in her bridal gown and veil.

'Did you see a camel?'

'I certainly did. And my sons butchered it.'

'And when was that?'

'When I was a young bride.'

The king's men saw that the mother was the craziest of all, and gave up their search, losing all hope of finding the king's camel.

THE MAN WHO KNEW HOW TO DIVIDE A CHICKEN

There was once a man who lost all his wealth and became so poor that all he had was a chicken. 'Nanny,' he said to his mother, 'we can't live on a chicken, we'll starve to death. Cook this chicken with the head on it and let me take it to the king as a present. Maybe he will give me a reward for it and I'll come home with some money in my pocket.'

His mother cooked the chicken, and he put it in a bag and went to the palace. The king sat on his throne, talking with two of his councillors. The man bowed deeply, opened his bag and put the chicken before the king.

'What have you brought me? A chicken?' the king asked.

'May the king live long, it is a present for you,' the man said.

'Well, in that case you'd better divide it among us.'

The man gave the head to the king and the wings to the two councillors, and put the rest of the chicken back in the bag.

'I thought this chicken was a present for me. What are you doing, taking it back?'

'I divided it,' the man said.

'But you kept most of it for yourself.'

'May the king live long, you are the head of our kingdom, so I gave you the head. These two councillors are your arms, and I gave them the wings. As for us common folk, your subjects, we are the body of your kingdom. Tonight my wife and I will eat our portion of the chicken and offer prayers for your health and happiness.'

'Go home and enjoy your portion,' the king said, and gave the man a fistful of gold coins.

On his way home the man played with the coins, tossed them up into the air and caught them as they fell; or flipped them to the ground. He was happy with his reward. He met another councillor of the king, who

Apples of Immortality

thought to himself: 'Where did this fool get all this money?' The councillor greeted him.

'Good day, brother.'

'God's day.'

'Where did you get all this gold you are playing with?'

'I cooked a chicken and took it to the king and he gave me a fistful of gold coins as a reward for my present.'

The councillor went on his way thinking: 'If the king gave this fool all that money for a chicken, then I'll take him a roast goose as a present.'

The next day this councillor went to the palace with a roast goose. He bowed and put the roast goose before the king, who was again talking with the same councillors from his throne.

'May the king live long, I brought you this roast goose as a present,' he said.

'Well, carve it up then, divide it among us, and let's eat it,' said the king.

The councillor didn't know how to divide the goose and give each man the right piece. The king said:

'Where is that poor man who divided the chicken yesterday? We'll let him divide this goose also.'

The poor man was summoned to the palace, and the king asked him to divide the goose. And again, he gave the head to the king, the wings to the two councillors, and tossed the rest of the goose into his bag.

'What are you doing? I said divide it.'

'I divided it.'

'You divided it? How?'

'May the king live long, I gave you the head because you are the head of our kingdom. The wings went to your two councillors, who are your arms. And we common folk who are your subjects are the body of your kingdom. So tonight my wife and I will enjoy our portion of this goose and offer prayers for your health and happiness.'

'But you didn't give anything to the man who brought me the goose,' the king said.

'Let his portion be forty blows on his soles with a good stout stick for being so greedy. Here I am, a poor man, and I brought you as a present the only chicken I had, hoping to get a reward for it, but this man is rich, he is a councillor, a merchant, and is in no need of a reward.'

The poor man received another fistful of gold coins, and the councillor received forty blows and was thrown out of the palace in disgrace.

MIGHTY DEZHIKO

Dezhiko was a poor luckless fellow. All he owned was a restless kicking cow and two goats. His wife was a heartless woman who kept scolding him: 'Why don't you go somewhere else to get a job? Why don't you make some money? Why don't you bring me something nice to wear? It's time we owned a few oxen and horses and sheep like our neighbours.'

One day Dezhiko took the cow, and shouldering the fire poker, said to himself, 'I am going away. I hope I never see this heartless woman again.'

Dezhiko didn't know where he was going. He was a forlorn figure on the road, and so fearful of what might happen to him that he shook like a leaf. He thought he'd rather be a prey to wild beasts than suffer at the hands of his wife.

While travelling, he lived on the milk of his cow, and when too tired to walk, he even rode his cow. He stretched out in a shady spot to take a nap while the cow grazed beside him. The flies gave him no rest. He cursed his wife and caught a fistful of flies, crushing them in his hand. When he opened his hand he saw he had killed seven flies. This gave him courage; he felt better. He rode his cow to the outskirts of a village with the poker on his shoulder, and found a priest to write on a piece of paper what he had done. The priest wrote, as a joke:

Mighty Dezhiko as all warriors know
Can slay seven souls by a single blow.

Dezhiko pasted the paper between the horns of the cow and took to the road again. His next resting place was a grassy field, and as he lay down to sleep he could see a castle at the far end of the field. Seven brothers lived in this castle and they were astounded to see a trespasser on their land. One of these seven brothers came to see who the tres-

Apples of Immortality

passer was, and read these words scrawled on a piece of paper stuck between the horns of the cow :

Mighty Dezhiko as all warriors know
Can slay seven souls by a single blow.

'No wonder,' the man thought, 'he is not afraid to sleep here all alone. He goes unarmed, he doesn't even have a horse. This warrior must be fearless.'

The man hurried back to the castle and told his brothers about Dezhiko, and now all seven of them came to pay him their respects and invite him



to their castle. The cow was so frightened and bellowed so loudly that Dezhiko was roused from his sleep, and as he opened his eyes he saw seven giants standing around him. He seized his poker and sprang to his feet to defend himself against them. The seven giants pleaded with him to spare their lives. They tried to tell him who they were, and that they meant no harm.

'We are seven brothers,' they said, 'and we are well known in these parts for our strength and courage. You will make us very happy by living in our castle as our big brother. Our castle and everything we own is yours, and we are at your command, you be our master.'

Dezhiko stopped shaking and said, 'Very well, let's go.'

They led him to their castle. They spread a feast before him, and waited on him hand and foot. Dezhiko did not say much, he was in deep thought, wondering how he could get out of the castle alive, and his grave demeanour impressed them even more. The seven brothers took his silence as another proof of his prowess. They spoke to one another with signs

Mighty Dezhiko

and discreet coughs and acted as though they were his humble servants. Dezhiko ordered them to sit down.

After he finished eating and had rested for a while the seven brothers said: 'Master, we are at your service, always ready to carry out your orders. If you tell us where you left your horse, your arms and your servants we will bring them to you.'

'I don't need a horse, I don't need arms and servants when I travel,' said Dezhiko. 'Such things are for cowards, not for me. Wherever I go, I have the whole world at my beck and call. Everybody is my servant. You saw me coming here with nothing but a cow and a stick, and that's enough for a man of my courage. I am Dezhiko, and all warriors know I can slay seven souls by a single blow.'

They gazed upon him with wonder and admiration, and asked him to marry their only sister, a beautiful young maiden. Dezhiko knew he was unworthy of that honour, but what could he do? He was their guest and he did his best to please them.

'If you insist, I'll marry your sister,' he said.

They dressed him in splendid clothes and gave him their sister at a lavish wedding in the castle. Four warlike princes had wanted to marry this beautiful maiden but were turned down by her brothers. They were furious when they heard about it, and marched on the castle with all their warriors.

Dezhiko was frightened to death. He felt trapped. There was no escape.

'Just give us the word and we'll take care of them,' said the seven brothers. 'We'll let you know if we need your help.'

Dezhiko looked at them with teeth chattering, and they thought he was so angry he could kill all seven of them on the spot.

'Very well, go fight them!' Dezhiko said at last.

The four princes expected the seven brothers to bring their dreaded brother-in-law with them, the man who could slay seven souls at a single blow, and were relieved to see they did not have to fight Dezhiko also. The battle did not go well for the seven brothers, and they asked for Dezhiko's help:

'We are in a tight spot. Your fiery horse and weapons are ready for you in the castle.'

'Woe is me,' Dezhiko sighed. 'Now I have to go fight them myself, or be the laughing stock of the whole world. I have to save my honour even if these princes cut me to pieces with their swords. I see no other way out.'

The fiery horse sensed that the man on his back was an inexperienced rider, and bolted away. Dezhiko flew straight into the enemy camp, and

Apples of Immortality

everybody who saw him thought: 'Who can stand up against this warrior? The horse shot past a tree, and Dezhiko jumped out of the saddle, held on to the tree and let the horse go. It was a dead tree, and so rotten that Dezhiko pulled it up while trying to hang on to it.

'This man can pull up a tree by its roots! He is coming after us to slaughter us with a tree!' the princes cried, and fled with their armies. So great with the confusion caused by Dezhiko's appearance on the battlefield that the enemy warriors killed one another as they fell back in disorder.

The seven brothers ran up to Dezhiko and embraced him as their saviour. 'Ah, you are the bravest of the brave!' they said, and threw themselves at his feet. The enemy was routed. And flushed with their victory, the seven brothers took Dezhiko back to the castle as the greatest hero they ever saw.

The four princes decided at a council that they had better save their necks before a vengeful angry Dezhiko attacked them again, and each sent him 1,000 ewes, 10 mares followed by their young colts and many other gifts and begged Dezhiko to allow them to become his subjects.

FATHER SLIK GOES TO PARADISE

‘Wife,’ said Father Slik, ‘let’s pack up, take the children and go to paradise.’

They loaded all their possessions on their donkey, and with the children walking in front of them set out for paradise. On their way they met a man who said: ‘Good day, reverend, where are you moving?’

‘I am going to paradise.’

‘To paradise? How? You must be out of your mind, reverend. How can a man go to paradise before he dies? Don’t you know it’s in the next world?’

‘What do you know about it? What’s your name?’

‘Can’t you recognize me? I am Adam.’

‘Listen, Adam. God created you in the full glory of man and put you in the Garden of Eden. Why, you could have lived there forever, eating, drinking, making merry. You had a wonderful life. You had everything you wanted. But you weren’t satisfied with what God gave you, you had to eat the forbidden fruit, and you got all of us into this mess. We have been paying for your sins. If you could go to paradise, why can’t I?’

Father Slik raised his stick to strike him, but Adam got away, and the priest continued his journey. It’s hard to say how far he went when he met another traveller on the road.

‘Blessings, Father Slik.’

‘God bless you.’

‘Where are you going?’

‘I am going to paradise.’

‘Are you mad? Don’t you know a man can’t go to paradise until after he dies?’

‘Who are you to tell me that?’

‘I am Matos Aga.’

Apples of Immortality

'I have heard of you, you greedy miser. You go to paradise and you say I can't? Get out of my way or I'll break your legs.'

Matos Aga fled as Father Slik raised his stick. The priest kept going and met another man.

'Blessings, Father Slik. Where to?'

'God bless you. I am going to paradise.'

'Don't talk like a fool, reverend. How can a man go to paradise before he dies?'

'Who are you to tell me that?'

'I am Noah.'

'Well, well, so you are Noah! You deceived God, you were the cause of the flood, you didn't care if the whole world were destroyed as long as you were safe yourself, and you went to paradise. And now you tell me I can't. Well, Noah, I am going, whether you like it or not.'

Before long the village priest bumped into another man on the road. 'Good day, Father Slik, where are you going?'

'I am going to paradise.'

'Are you out of your mind to think you can go to paradise before you die?'

'Who are you?'

'I am Abraham.'

'You slew your own son and went to paradise and now you tell me I can't?'

Abraham fled as Father Slik chased after him with his stick. The priest jogged along the road and met another man.

'Where are you going, Father Slik?'

'I am going to paradise.'

'Are you crazy? It isn't like going to the next village, you know. Paradise is in the next world. You have to die first before you get there.'

'And who are you to tell me that?'

'Don't you know me? I am Moses.'

'Look here, Moses, are you a just man when you fooled your own people and led them into the wilderness, and for forty years they wandered around the desert with you? You ruined their lives, and you died on the mountain, without ever seeing the Land of Promise. Get out of my way or I'll break your legs.'

Moses fled as Father Slik went after him with his stick. Not long afterward the priest ran into another traveller.

'Where are you going, Father Slik?'

'I am going to paradise.'

Father Slik Goes to Paradise

'May God have mercy on your soul, reverend. You can't be in your right mind. Have you gone mad?'

'You'd better tell me who you are before you say another word.'

'Are you blind? Can't you see who I am? I am David.'

'May you go blind, curly Dave! You had forty wives, yet you murdered Uriah and snatched away his wife too, and you went to paradise. Why can't I? Come, wife, we haven't any time to lose. I swear by the marble tomb of St Karapet we are going to paradise and nobody is going to keep us out of it!'

Soon the priest met another fellow who wouldn't let him pass. This man held the donkey by the bridle and yelled at him: 'How dare you travel with your whole household without a permit?'

'I am Father Slik, going to paradise.'

'Turn back, or I will take your soul this very instant.'

'Who are you to talk to me like that? I'll break every bone in your body.'

'Are you blind, can't you see? I am the angel Gabriel.'

'You are the blind one, Gabo. Every day you claim the lives of thousands upon thousands of people, making no distinction between the just and unjust, the good and the bad, and you live in paradise. Why can't I?'

The priest raised his stick and struck Gabriel so hard that he cracked the angel's leg. Gabriel hobbled away on his good leg before Father Slik broke his other leg also.

The priest kept going until at last he saw a great white mansion with towers looming ahead of him. 'Wife, that must be paradise,' he said. 'Let's sit down here and have a bite to eat and rest a little before we enter paradise.'

They sat down on the grass and enjoyed a good meal. Feeling rested and refreshed, they got up and walked up to the gate of the mansion. A big man barred their way.

'Who are you?' this man wanted to know.

'I am Father Slik. Here is my wife. These are our children. And this is our donkey. We came to enter paradise.'

'Reverend, you are a parish priest. I take it you can read and write, you know the power of the written word, the difference between black and white. Don't you know a man has to die and be buried before he can enter paradise?'

'Here we are standing before the very gate of paradise and you won't let us in? I'd like to take a peek at it and see what it looks like from the inside.'

Apples of Immortality

'You can't. What you are asking for is an unheard of thing.'

'And what may your name be? I'd like to know your name also.'

'I am Christ.'

'May God have mercy on you too! You would not have been caught and crucified if you were a wholly good man. Wife, let's go back. May God wreck this kind of paradise; I don't care for it.'

And bitterly disappointed, Father Slik turned back with his wife, his children, and his donkey.

NOTES

To save space, *Armenian Folk Tales*, published by the Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences, is referred to in these Notes by the number of the volume, in Roman numerals; followed by the number of the tale in the particular volume; the original title of the tale; the name of the collector; the year in which the tale was recorded or first published; and the name of the narrator, when known. Thus II-No. 1, 'Apple of Immortality,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-82, narrator unknown—means 'Apples of Immortality' is tale No. 1 in Vol. II of *Armenian Folk Tales* published by the Armenian Academy, its original title is 'Apple of Immortality,' the collector's name is Tigran Navasardianz, who wrote it down probably in 1876-82, and the narrator is unknown.

Armenian Folk Tales, edited by A. T. Ghanalanian, is referred to in these Notes as *Tales*, 1950. Servantsian's *Hamov-Hotov* is referred to by the title of the book, *Hamov-Hotov*.

INTRODUCTION

Though Armenia is rich in historical documents, there is as yet no satisfactory history of Armenia in English. Only a few titles can be listed here for background reading.

H. F. B. LYNCH, *Armenia, travels and studies*, 2 vols. First published in 1901, this is still the best single work on Armenia in English; a classic.

RENÉ GROUSSET, *Histoire de l'Arménie, des origines à 1071*, 1947. By a distinguished orientalist and member of the French Academy. Difficult to obtain. I was unable to buy a copy in Paris in 1964.

PAUL Z. BEDOUKIAN, *Coinage of Cilician Armenia*. The American Numismatic Society, New York, 1962.

FRIDTJOF NANSEN, *Armenia and the Near East*, 1928. As high commissioner for refugees to the League of Nations the Arctic explorer and scientist visited Armenia, and this book contains some first-hand information about the plight of displaced Armenians after World War I and the Treaty of Lausanne ending the Greek-Turkish War.

LOUISE NALBANDIAN. *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement*. Univ. of California Press, 1963.

RICHARD G. HOVANNISIAN, *Armenia on the Road to Independence*. University of California Press, 1967.

Apples of Immortality

JACQUES DE MORGAN, *History of the Armenian people, from the remotest times to the present day*. Trans. by Ernest F. Barry, Boston, Hairenik Association. French text published in 1919. Not as good as Grousset's history; too sketchy.

SIRAPIE DER NERSESSIAN, *Armenia and the Byzantine Empire; a brief study of Armenian art and civilization*, 1945. By a recognized Armenian authority on the subject, published by Harvard University Press. Too brief.

MALACHIA ORMANIAN, *The Church of Armenia, her history, doctrine, rule, discipline, liturgy, literature*. Trans. from the French edition, 1912. An authoritative work by a former Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, who wrote a monumental history of the Church of Armenia, in Armenian.

J. STRZYGOWSKI, *Die Baukunst Der Armenier Und Europa*. Vienna, 1918, two volumes.

My own books may not be without interest for background information :

LEON SURMELIAN, *I Ask You, Ladies and Gentlemen*, introduction by William Saroyan, 1945. The story of my Armenian boyhood; to be reissued by Allen and Unwin Ltd in 1969.

—, *Daredevils of Sassoun, The Armenian National Epic*. (UNESCO Collection of Representative Works), George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966; American edition, Alan Swallow, 1964.

Details of the dramatic reception accorded the last king of Armenia in Madrid, Paris, London, with sources, are given in K. J. BASMADJIAN'S *Levon V Lusignan, verjin takavor hayots* (Leon V. Lusignan, the last king of the Armenians). Paris, 1908. Leon V visited London twice, according to certain documents, though Holinshed does not mention the second visit. Basmadjian also wrote *Histoire moderne des arméniens*. Paris, 1917.

POPE GREGORY XIII: quoted by Jacques de Morgan.

Byron spent three months (December 1816–March 1817) in the Armenian monastery on the island of San Lazzaro in the lagoon of Venice, where he was popular with the Mekhitarist vardapets, Armenian Benedictines. His room is preserved to this day as he left it. He did some translations from Armenian into English and helped write an Armenian Grammar. The following 'interesting fragment', in Thomas Moore's words, was found among Lord Byron's papers, and evidently was intended to be a preface to the Armenian Grammar. See THOMAS MOORE, *The Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*.

'The English reader will probably be surprised to find my name associated with a work of the present description, and inclined to give me more credit for my attainments as a linguist than they deserve.

'As I would not willingly be guilty of a deception, I will state, as shortly as I can, my own share in the compilation, with the motives which led to it. On my arrival at Venice in the year 1816, I found my mind in a state which required study, and study of a nature which should leave little scope for the imagination, and furnish some difficulty in the pursuit.

'At this period I was much struck—in common, I believe, with every other traveller—with the society of the Convent of St Lazarus, which appears to unite all the advantages of the monastic institution, without any of its vices.

'The neatness, the comfort, the gentleness, the unaffected devotion, the accomplishments, and the virtues of the brethren of the order, are well fitted to strike the man of the world with the conviction that 'there is another and a better' even in this life.

'These men are the priesthood of an oppressed and a noble nation, which has partaken of the proscription and bondage of the Jews and of the Greeks, without the sullenness of the former or the servility of the latter. This people has attained riches without usury, and all the honours that can be awarded to slavery without intrigue. But they have long occupied, nevertheless, a part of 'the House of Bondage', who has lately multiplied her many mansions. It would be difficult, perhaps, to find the annals of a nation less stained with crimes than those of the Armenians, whose virtues have been those of peace and their vices those of compulsion. But whatever may have been their destiny—and it has been bitter—whatever it may be in future, their country must ever be one of the most interesting on the globe; and perhaps their language only requires to be more studied to become more attractive. If the Scriptures are rightly understood, it was in Armenia that Paradise was placed, Armenia, which has paid as dearly as the descendents of Adam for that fleeting participation of its soil in the happiness of Him who was created from its dust. It was in Armenia that the flood first abated, and the dove alighted. But with the disappearance of Paradise itself may be dated almost the unhappiness of the country, for though long a powerful kingdom, it was scarcely ever an independent one, and the satraps of Persia and the pachas of Turkey have alike desolated the region where God created man in His own image.'

(From *San Lazzaro, The Armenian Monastery near Venice*, guidebook in English printed on the island.)

ARTASHES NAZINIAN of the Armenian Academy is preparing an Index of Armenian folktales using the Aarne-Thompson method. STITH THOMPSON'S *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* is rated highly in Armenia. I have made no attempt in these Notes to relate Armenian tales to the whole folktale tradition of the Caucasus and the Near East region, or to supply identifying numbers and types. Such information would be of interest only to the specialist, and requires a specialist.

'When we speak of the folklore of Europe, the latter term must not be understood in an administrative sense. Caucasia belongs administratively, to European Russia; but its folklore (like its languages) is non-European and inseparable from Iran. On the other hand, certain Near Eastern countries (Anatolia, Armenia, and Syria) are not really Asiatic but Mediterranean, i.e. European. Their folklore must therefore be considered in any comprehensive

Apples of Immortality

treatment of European folklore.' (ALEXANDER H. KRAPPE, 'European Folklore,' *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, Funk and Wagnals, New York.) Particularly true in the case of Armenia.

1. APPLES OF IMMORTALITY

II-No. 1, 'Apple of Immortality,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-1882, narrator unknown.

V-No. I, 'Golden Apple,' Grigorian, 1922.

'There was and there was not a king: *Gar-chegar tahkavor me-gar*.'

Dev: monster, giant, ogre, demon. Compare with *divus*, divine, god. Devs live in wells, caves, woods, deserts, mountains, and other inaccessible places; they can hurl rocks as big as mountains; one dev can kill a thousand men in battle. There are also female devs or ogresses, mothers or sisters of these monsters. I remember that my mother threatened to call the devs when I misbehaved and dismissed them by saying, 'No, don't take him away,' and shielded me from the monsters when, terrified, I was on my good behaviour again.

Emerald-bird: an immense fabulous vulture like the *simurgh*, or perhaps the *simurgh* itself.

Wish: *muraz* (from Arabic, Turkish *murad*.) 'Sacred wish' might be a more correct translation of this word in the concluding formula of Armenian tales.

I have taken only a few relatively minor details from the Karabagh variant of this tale. Most of the tellers—and the masters of the craft—are men. The village woman would hesitate to appear at a community gathering and would shy away from a public performance. Tales are told to a group of listeners, and it is something of a social event when a favourite narrator entertains his audience with his *hekiatner*. He is not an average peasant but an important person in his community by virtue of his narrative talents, pointed out as a master story-teller. Armenians look up to their poets. The poet is a 'word-maker,' and the unwritten word also carries prestige, and indeed is closer to the heart of the peasant. The collection of Armenian folktales began in Karabagh, in 1860, recorded in the local dialect by a school teacher.

2. THE SWINEHERD

II-No. 6, 'The Swineherd,' Lalayan, 1913, narrator 55-year-old illiterate sexton in Echmiadzin (known also as Vagharshapat). All tales in vol. II were collected in this village. Vagharshapat, at the foot of Mt Ararat, was for centuries the capital of ancient Armenia. Today it is a suburban town of orchards and vineyards within the metropolitan area of Erevan.

Water as the source of life and the secret of strength is a widespread motif in Armenian folklore. In *Daredevils of Sassoun* the folk heroes, Sanasar and

Notes

Balthasar, the twins who founded Sassoun, are waterborn, and David of Sassoun becomes a mighty giant by drinking from a spring of immortality and bathing in it.

The armband (bazband) indicates a royal origin.

3. ROSE-MAIDEN

I-No. 26, 'Rose-Maiden,' Lalayan, 1914, narrator a 55-year-old peasant in Parbi, near Erevan, who learned it from his father, a famous story-teller in the village.

The Armenian title is *Varditer*, 'Rose-Petal.' In another variant of this tale (V-No. 4) the title is: 'The Maiden from Whose Lips Fell Roses and Violets.'

4. TALE OF THE LAD WITH GOLDEN LOCKS

I-No. 18, 'The Tale of the Lad with Golden Locks,' Lalayan, 1913, narrator an illiterate 45-year-old peasant.

'Arab': not a jin as in 'The Magic Candlestick,' but a black man who is the king's stablemaster. Wealthy Turkish and Persian families employed 'arabs' (blacks) as trusted servants. In Trebizond, a Persian family we were friendly with had an 'arab' servant girl whose parents or grandparents were slaves. And I remember the black uniformed 'arabs' guarding the gates of Turkish mansions in Istanbul. There is little colour prejudice in Islam, and the slaves on the whole were treated well by the families that owned them. The average Armenian peasant was not likely to see an 'arab'.

Golden hair is esteemed in these folktales not so much as blond hair, but as a sign of royal origin or as a standard of perfection. Blond hair is by no means rare among Armenians and blue or grey eyes are fairly common. The apple of immortality is called also a golden apple.

Poghos (Pavghos): Paul. In Armenian *l* becomes *gh*. Petros is Peter.

'Bird of truth.' It is simply 'bird' in the original text. These birds have a habit of flying away when a dishonest person enters the room or tells a lie.

The hero is rewarded with two beautiful brides. A Moslem influence? Armenians are strictly monogamous. We have two brides also in 'Tale of A Boy's Dream,' which is more understandable. The three engagement rings the daughters of the shepherd pick up are placed on a *kursi*, a wooden chair-like table or stand under which a low fire burns, and which is covered with a large quilt coverlet. On cold winter nights Armenian peasants keep their feet warm with a *kursi*.

Apples of Immortality

5. MAGIC CANDLESTICK

I-No. 25, 'The Tale of the Woodcutter,' Lalayan, 1914, narrator a 40-year-old peasant woman, daughter of an *ashugh*, or minstrel.

The 'arabs' in this tale are jinn, or supernatural beings—clearly a Moslem influence. Sometimes 'black' is added to 'arab'.

Houri-peri: *Houri* is a familiar word in English; *peri* also may be found in English dictionaries. *Hour* (hoor) means fire in Armenian, and the *houri-peris* are 'fiery' maidens—supernatural maidens of wondrous beauty. The pagan Armenians, before the establishment of Christianity as the state religion in the fourth century, were sun and fire worshippers, and sun, fire, have connotations of supernatural life or divine beauty. *Peri* (*pheri*) is so close to fairy that I can't help wondering why the word fairy is said to be derived from the Late Latin *fata*, fate, and not from Persian *peri*.

6. THE BIRD-PERI

I-No. 2, 'The Bird-Peri,' Lalayan, 1913, narrator 51-year-old illiterate peasant.

These talking horses often act as the hero's guide on a journey.

Blindness magically cured is a recurrent theme also in Armenian tales.

7. JAN-POLAD: STEEL-MONSTER

Hamov-Hotov, 'Patikan and Khan Boghou.'

Jan-Polad means Steel-Monster.

The separable soul hidden away in a wild beast; cutting an iron pole with a wooden axe; three marriage tests; the sword of chastity—these are well-known motifs. The novelty of Armenian tales lies in new combinations or arrangements of such widespread motifs (or themes or episodes, we do not have a satisfactory word) that make up the plot.

8. THE RED COW

Tales, 1950, 'The Red Cow,' 1912, narrator a 42-year-old peasant. Also, with some slight changes to make the language more comprehensible to children, in *Armenian Folk Tales*, edited by Artashes Nazinian, Erevan, 1956.

Armenian variant of the universal Cinderella story, the red cow here being a mother substitute who cares for the children before and after she is sacrificed for the stepdaughter's health. Here the old woman in the well is a benevolent fairy figure. In another variant, III-Supplement-No. 9, the girl wears golden slippers and goes to church. Other episodes are mixed in this tale and unfortunately it is in conventional literary language.

Notes

9. THE PEASANT'S SON AND THE FORTY ROBBERS

I-No. 8, 'The Tale of Peasant Ohan's Son,' Lalayan, 1912, narrator a 60-year-old illiterate peasant who travelled from one village to another as a *hakim*, or healer, and meanwhile told tales; an energetic man, with a keen mind. II-No. 4, 'Forty Robbers,' probably 1876-1902, Navasardianz, narrator his own wife.

Peasant Ohan: 'Farmer John.'

10. ZULVISIA

Hamov-Hotov, 'Zulvisia'.

Servantsian's vivid language in the opening paragraphs of this tale gives us a glimpse of the Armenian countryside. His style is always lively, folksy, 'tasty-and-fragrant,' and here it has a literary touch about it in his characteristic manner. Zulvisia is a fabulous femme fatale, a siren in a crystal castle, luring men to their destruction, until she meets the man who breaks her spell.

Chin-ma-Chin: China, as a mythical land of magic and mystery rather than China in a geographic sense, as stated in the introduction.

The old hag is a standard character in Armenian tales, adept at witchcraft, skillful in ferreting out secrets, in deceiving people, and in general acting as the very embodiment of evil.

11. TALE OF THE LAUGHING FISH

IV-No. 10, 'The Ploughman's Son,' A. Mekhitarianz, probably 1901, narrator unknown.

This tale shows the superior wisdom of a little country boy—and by extension of humble folk—in their dealings with kings and queens.

In the poetics of Armenian tales we can see the dramatic and ironic effects of discoveries or recognitions and of reversals of the situation as basic plot ingredients, as in Greek tragedy and epic.

12. THE WOODCUTTER

II-No. 10. 'Woodcutter,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-88, narrator unknown.

13. TALE OF THE HUNTER'S SON

I-No. 23, 'The Tale of the Hunter's Son,' Lalayan, 1913, narrator an illiterate 50-year-old miller, whose father and grandfather also were famous story-

Apples of Immortality

tellers in the village. II-Supplement-No. 2, 'Hunter's Son,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-1908, narrator unknown.

The heroes in Armenian tales generally hunt with bows and arrows; this boy uses his father's old flintlock.

There are no elephants in Armenia.

Mt Ararat is also called Masis by Armenians, as in this tale.

Mt Aragaz with its four volcanic peaks, is another mountain dear to Armenians. There are beautiful folksongs about Mt Aragaz. Astro-physical research in the Armenian republic is centred in the observatory on Mt Aragaz, where Armenia claims to have the largest telescope in Europe.

Tiflis (Tbilisi), the capital of the Georgian republic, is often mentioned in Armenian folktales, and its traditional image as a gay holiday city of 'wine, women and song' is affirmed in this tale.

14. SUN-MAID AND DRAGON PRINCE

I-No. 17, 'Sun-Maid and Dragon-Prince,' Lalayan, 1912, narrator a 65-year-old illiterate peasant. *Hamov-Hotov*. 'Dragon-Prince and Sun-Maid.'

Arevhat means Sun-Maid. *Arev*: sun.

Childlessness is the great grief of Armenian parents, among kings and commoners alike.

The poetic description of the castle-of-the-sun is from Servantsian's version of this tale completing the story in I-No. 17. There are word-pictures in Servantsian's folktales in which we see the peasant's sharp observing eye and lively imagination at work. His prose is shot through with the stars and wild flowers of Armenia.

15. ALO-DINO AND THE NIGHTINGALE OF A THOUSAND SONGS, HAZARAN BULBUL

I-No. 1, 'Hazaran Bulbul and Alo-Dino,' Lalayan, 1912, narrator the same 65-year-old illiterate peasant who told 'Sun-Maid and Dragon-Prince,' I-No. 17.

Hazaran Bulbul means the Nightingale of a thousand songs.

Cutting off noses and ears is still practiced in some Mohammedan countries as proof of death; or as a refinement in torture.

16. BROTHER-LAMB

II-No. 18, 'Brother-Lamb,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-82, narrator unknown. III-No. 15, 'Brother-Lambs,' Haikouni, narrator a peasant monk in the monastery of Sevan.

Notes

In the monk's version the girl and her little brother are named Mariam (Mary) and Manouk (Child).

17. TALE OF A BOY'S DREAM

II-No. 26, 'The Tale of a Boy's Dream,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-94, narrator unknown.

Nearly all the goldsmiths in Constantinople before World War I were Armenians. For a long time the master goldsmiths of the Turkish sultans were Armenians, and the title of imperial goldsmith was hereditary: in the Duzian family, for instance. The Duzians later became directors of the Turkish imperial mint. (Eleanora Duse is said to have been a descendant of the Duzians.) Many wealthy families in Turkey and Persia had their own private goldsmiths. In Van Armenian goldsmiths maintained a tradition going back to the ancient kingdom of Urartu. Many of the best goldsmiths in Turkey were from Van, and even more famous for its goldsmiths was Trebizond.

In the Near East West Europeans are called Franks (or Frengs); Frankistan is the land of Franks. I remember the Frank quarter in Trebizond, inhabited by cosmopolitan descendants of Frenchmen or Italians and by Catholic Armenians, who intermarried with them. The Franks in Trebizond kept away from Greeks, because of old animosities. Until World War I Catholic Armenians enjoyed the traditional protection of France. They had their own patriarch in Constantinople. Armenia's relations with Frankistan go back to ancient times. During the Middle Ages Italian merchants enjoyed treaty rights in Armenian ports on the Mediterranean, and Latin was an official language of the Armenian court. The first five Armenian books were printed in Venice, in 1512-13. The first Armenian bible was printed in Amsterdam, in 1666. The national reawakening of Armenians began in the eighteenth century in their European colonies. Wherever Armenians settled they took their language, their church, and their folkways with them, and it might not be unreasonable to assume that Armenians, whether as merchants or as settlers, have played a part in the migration of folktales.

18. TALE OF THE WIZARD

II-No. 28. 'The Tale of Sour-Cabbage Soup,' Lalayan, 1913.

This soup, called *makhokh*, is cooked with pickled cabbage and parched, crushed wheat, the latter a basic ingredient in the diet of the average Armenian, and known as bulgur.

By sucking the breasts of the hideous ogress* the heroine wins her favour, and becomes an adopted daughter of the ogress, as it were. And this is the way the breasts of ogresses are often described—thrown over the shoulders.

* A gesture of securing protection, the status of a 'milk-child'.

Apples of Immortality

19. FAITHFUL WIFE

II, No. 22, 'The Woman Who Remained Faithful,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-1902, narrator unknown; II-Supplement-No. 3, 'Faithful Wife,' 1913, Lalayan, narrator a native of Echmiadzin.

The rigid moral code of the Armenian peasant forbids marital infidelity even when husband and wife are separated for many years. Adultery is almost unheard of, and a man can kill his unfaithful wife, secretly or openly, and go unpunished, as in this tale. A loose woman is publicly disgraced and expelled from the village.

Sturdy peasants from the Armenian highlands, particularly in the western part, under Turkish rule, left their impoverished villages and went to work as hamals (porters) and do other menial jobs in Constantinople and in various Russian cities. It was a common sight to see an Armenian carrying a piano or a huge barrel or a few sacks of flour on his back as though it were nothing. There were at one time at least five thousand Armenian porters in Tiflis, and thirty thousand in Constantinople. Most of them remained naive and unspoiled in their dealings with city sharpers and enjoyed a high reputation for honesty. They lived on bread, olives, cheese, onions, and some of them on bread alone. They slept in dingy rooms, as many as nine or ten in one room, or in the streets. Living away from home, these men always longed for some news from the homeland, and there are beautiful folk songs expressing these yearnings of Armenians in exile. At night, after their back-breaking toil, they got together and told tales, like the stories in this collection, and sang the old village songs.

There were no railroads in those early days and a man had to cross Asia Minor on foot to reach Constantinople; so he had to take enough food with him to last him several weeks. And even Trebizond, on the Black Sea, meant a long hazardous journey from Van or Moush. In Trebizond they could board a ship, if they had the money, and go to Constantinople or some Russian port on the Black Sea—Batumi, Sukhumi, Odessa. They were gone for five, ten, fifteen years, and returned to their native villages with their savings if they were not stolen. Late in the nineteenth century a few even managed to reach America.

A few comments here about Armenian women and family life may not be out of order. In the large cities on both sides of the Russo-Turkish border the life of the Armenian woman in an upper-middle-class home was not much different from that of most women in Western Europe and America, but in many villages and in small towns too, the old patriarchal order prevailed, each household consisting of twenty, thirty, or more members, presided over by the 'grand pap'. Men worked in the fields, or at various jobs in the nearest town, and women were busy with their household chores, cooking, churning butter, making cheese, cleaning, spinning, sewing, knitting, weaving rugs.

The birth of a son was a cause for much rejoicing; a daughter meant another mouth to feed and another dowry to worry about. She led a much more restricted and sheltered life than her brothers. Even young girls of four or five were not permitted to bathe with boys of their age. By the time she became thirteen or fourteen the girl and her parents had to think of marriage, and she was considered 'ripe' at fifteen or sixteen. They married young. A girl could not step out of the house without her mother or an older woman accompanying her. As she was watched by neighbours as a possible bride for their sons she had to appear at her best, her hair carefully groomed, using makeup (*surmé*) on her eyes to make them appear larger and more beautiful, wearing her Sunday clothes and whatever jewellery she possessed. In Trebizond people joked about my grandfather, said he used *surmé* on his eyes and nicknamed him *Surmeli*, which inevitably became *Surmelián*.

In many parts of Armenia a village girl saw her husband perhaps for the first time in church, during the wedding ceremony, for all marriages were arranged by parents, and the wedding feast, as in these tales, did last for seven days and seven nights. Three days and three nights was the rule in more recent times. Everybody in the village ate, drank, danced and made merry, and even the poorest were welcome guests. A wedding was a community affair. The drums and bagpipes, and the fiddles, and the lutes (*oot*, *saz*) played day and night. Most weddings took place in winter.

For seven years after her marriage the young bride could not even talk to her husband in the presence of others. Obedience, silence, modesty: that was her lot. After seven years when she herself was the mother of a few children, she was allowed to wear a white veil instead of a red veil and could talk with members of her household and close relatives, but not with her mother-in-law and her father-in-law. This rule of silence and obedience prevented back talk to in-laws and insured the peace of the household, with three, four, five brides living under the same roof. Men and women did not eat together. In the churches there was a separate section for women. To talk with a strange man, or even to look at him, was forbidden, and could ruin a woman's reputation. Even in a fairly large city like Trebizond 'dating' in the American manner was an unimaginable freedom, and there was not, to the best of my knowledge, a single divorced woman in our community. Divorce was common among Turks and Persians. Islam allows it. The modesty and silence of Armenian women is proverbial. 'You can cut her with a knife and you won't get a squeak out of her' is a high praise for a girl.

It was considered immodest for a village bride to mention her husband by name even when talking with neighbours. She referred to her husband as 'he' or as her child's father. She talked to him in whispers or in the privacy of their bedroom. When she put on her white veil as a sign of her higher position in the household she could show part of her face to neighbours. A childless wife was without respect in her family and in the community. Her

'Apples of Immortality

husband could, if he wanted, marry another woman who could bear him children. But this rarely happened.

A woman's status went up with the number of her sons. A son continued the family line, and the Armenian's wish to have a son by all means might be considered a form of ancestor worship.

Even illiterate peasants spared no sacrifice for the education of their sons, and fifty years ago nearly every Armenian village had a boys' school near its church. Not a few village boys went to Moscow or St Petersburg, to Constantinople, and even to Germany, Paris, Switzerland, to earn a university degree and become doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers. A few became famous generals in the Russian armies. Nor was the peasant girl deprived wholly of schooling. There were separate schools for girls. In the Western sector Armenians did not send their children to state schools, which were Turkish. They had their own school system, administered by the church and supported by the Armenians themselves. But Turkish was a required subject, along with French. I began to study French and Turkish in the third grade. In the Eastern sector the fashionable schools were the Russian gymnasias in the cities.

The woman's lot was certainly a hard one in the villages and her looks faded by the time she was thirty. She was like a prisoner in her own home. But the whole family lavished its care upon a bride before the birth of her child; she was fed the best foods and her every whim was satisfied. Village girls did not go to the city and work as maids. Our maid in Trebizond was a gorgeous country girl, but she was like an adopted daughter. She never went to school, but she took private lessons with my older sister in Armenian and French, and she was being brought up as a lady to be married off to a respectable city man. Rich Armenian families rarely employed Armenian girls as maids. Armenians are not used to being servants. It is a common saying among Armenians that 'our race has survived through the sanctity of our home life'.

These remarks are about village life in Armenia before World War I.

20. THE BOY WHO DID NOT WANT TO DIE

II-No. 25, 'Fate,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-1908, narrator unknown. IV-Supplement-No. 2, 'The Boy Who Did Not Want To Die,' Vard Bedoyan, 1946.

Father Fate: the word used by the narrator is *falak*, (from Arabic and Turkish) meaning heaven, fortune, and metaphorically, the wheel of fortune. *Falak* has a connotation of fate, destiny, something pre-ordained by heaven, and Father Fate expresses the meaning of the word perhaps a little better in English.

Notes

21. TALE OF THE ONE-EYED GIANT

III-No. 36, 'The Tale of the One-Eyed Giant,' Navasardianz, probably 1890-1900, narrator unknown. III-No. 9, 'Dove-Maidens,' Haikouni, narrator unknown.

There are many tales about the one-eyed giant, and as the reader can see he is very much like Homer's Polyphemus in *The Odyssey*. Evidently Homer himself used a folktale current among Greeks in Asia Minor, where he was born. The Mermaids are like Greek mermaids. The Armenian calls the one-eyed giant by a Turkish word, *tapagoz*, 'eye-in-the-head'.

22. THE FOX, THE WOLF, THE BEAR AND THE EMERALD-BIRD

II-No. 17, 'The Fox, the Wolf, the Bear and the Emerald-Bird,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-82, narrator unknown.

Significantly they go to Trebizond to find a wife for the king's son. 'The beauty of the Trapezuntine princesses was proverbial . . . they were perhaps the most valuable exports of their country.' William Miller, *Trebizond, The Last Greek Empire*, 1926, p. 68.

23. SHREWISH WIFE

II-No. 49, 'Shrewish Wife,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-94, narrator unknown.

24. HABERMANY, THE SERPENT-PRINCE

IV-No. 1, 'Habermany,' Alexander Aprikian, 1880, narrator unknown. IV-No. 23, 'The Tale of Mirza Mahmout,' A. Tovmasian, 1911, narrator unknown. III-No. 2, 'Enchanted Snake,' Haikouni, narrator 55-year-old night-watchman in the monastery of Echmiadzin, who knew more than 100 tales.

Nanny (nany, nené, and other spellings): granny, grandmother, mother, nurse.

Pappy (papy): exactly what it means in English.

Bagpipes and drums: *davoul zourna*.

Arena: *meidan* (*maydan*). Square perhaps would be the better word. In Trebizond we called the central square in the city, which was also the city park, Meidan.

The average Armenian peasant would hesitate to kill a snake in his house, for fear it would bring bad luck.

Apples of Immortality

25. HALVA-VENDOR

I—No. 23, 'Halva Vendor's Apprentice,' Lalayan, 1914, narrator a bright young peasant of 25 with some schooling, who learned it from his father, a famous story-teller in the village.

Halva: a flaky sweetmeat made of flour, sugar or honey, and the oil of sesame seeds; crushed nuts might be added.

Knucklebone: like other boys my age I had my collection of knucklebones; I poured molten lead into a knucklebone to use it as my prized leader. We played knucklebones like marbles.

Dervish: a wandering beggar belonging to a mystic order in Islam; but there are also dervishes who are not mendicants.

Ispahan (Isfahan): the former capital of Persia has an Armenian suburb, Julfa, named after the old Armenian town of Julfa on the present Soviet-Iranian frontier. During the Turkish-Persian wars that repeatedly devastated eastern Armenia Shah Abbas I followed a scorched-earth policy and ordered his Armenian subjects to cross the Araks river and resettle in Ispahan and in other parts of Persia. Thousands perished during the crossing of the river in winter; those who stayed behind were killed on the spot. The Turks were scarcely more merciful. Each side wanted to leave nothing to the other. Shah Abbas considered the Armenians an important link with Frankistan, and New Julfa shared in the prosperity of Ispahan during the great days of Persian power and riches in the middle of the seventeenth century. Here Armenian merchant princes who traded with Poland, Russia, England, France, Holland, the Republic of Venice, the Hanseatic cities, as well as with Turkey, Egypt, India, Java, China, gave magnificent receptions for Shah Abbas and his successors, who in turn granted them many privileges. New Julfa became also a cultural centre for Armenians. The colonies in India were offshoots of Julfa, and Armenian merchants were friendly rivals of the East India Company, whose officers looked upon them as the greatest merchants in the world. Like the king in this tale Shah Abbas went around in disguise to see how his subjects lived.

26. SLANDERED SISTER

IV—No. 36, 'The Tale of the Merchant Simon,' A. Thovmasian, 1911, narrator unknown. III—No. 38, 'Faithful Sister,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-80, narrator unknown.

Petros Aga: Sir or Master Petros. Aga is a courtesy title of respect. My father was an effendi. An educated man or one belonging to the upper gentleman class would have felt offended if called aga. Effendi too means sir or master, but has connotations of higher rank. The Sultan of Turkey was an effendi. A self-respecting porter or cab driver in Teheran, as I observed in

Notes

1964, likes to be addressed as aga, and expects to be treated as a lord or master in his own right. I liked the pride and dignity of these simple Iranians.

27. THERE ARE WOMEN AND THERE ARE WOMEN

Tales, 1950, 'There Are Women and There Are Women.' *Hamov-Hotov*, 'The Goldsmith and His Wife.'

Both variants are essentially the same story. Baghdad not mentioned in *Hamov-Hotov*, and the husband is a goldsmith, not a weaver. An event more likely to happen in old 'Baghdad'.

28. THE KING'S ROSE

II-No. 51, 'Rose of Immortality,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-88. Narrator unknown. Armenians are given to moralizing in their everyday talk. In moral tales like this one we see 'the wisdom of the East, where kings too are conscious of the transitory nature of man's life, and the insecurity and vanity of it all.

29. WISE WEAVER

Hamov-Hotov, 'The Wise Weaver.'

30. THE GOAT

I-No. 36, 'The Tale of the Goat,' Lalayan, 1914, narrator an 18-year-old village boy. Armenians enjoy short humorous tales of this type, but the assumption is that the unfaithful city wife is not Armenian.

31. THE OLD HAG

II-Supplement-No. 5, 1913, 'The Old Hag,' Lalayan, narrator an illiterate peasant of 40. The tricky old woman is not exactly a witch in this tale, and goes unscathed.

32. THE LAME MAN, THE BEARDLESS MAN, THE ONE-EYED MAN

I-No. 40, 'The Tale of the Lame Man, the Beardless Man, the One-Eyed Man,' 1914, Lalayan, narrator a native of the village of Parbi near Erevan, semi-literate, 40 years of age.

Aleppo (Halab) plays a surprisingly important role in Armenian folklore. It is frequently mentioned in *Daredevils of Sassoun*. As a great commercial city Aleppo was a centre of caravan roads, and wherever there were caravan

Apples of Immortality

roads, there were Armenians. Aleppo was conquered by John Tsimisces, the Armenian-born emperor of Byzantium, in 974. After Saladdin's death Aleppo remained in the hands of his successors until 1260, when the Tatars took it and delivered it to the Armenians, and Aleppo was for a short period in Armenian hands. Not far from the southern borders of historic Armenia, Aleppo has often been in conflict with Armenia. Today more Armenians live in Aleppo than ever before, most of them refugees from Cilicia and the Sanjak of Alexandretta. They have enjoyed the hospitality of the Syrians and have contributed to the present prosperity of the city.

Erevan is one of the oldest cities in the world—as old perhaps as Nineveh and Troy. In the eighth century B.C. there was a fortified city, Ereuni, in Urartu, on the present site of Erevan, according to the latest discoveries of Armenian archaeologists, and the present name of the city is obviously derived from Ereuni. Thus Erevan-Ereuni is older than Armenia herself. The powerful Urartian kingdom, a rival of Assyria, was destroyed in the sixth century B.C., after which the country became known as Armenia, and the Armenians, according to Herodotus, were a colony of the Phrygians, 'Freemen', and migrated from Thrace. Erevan celebrated its 2,750th anniversary in 1968.

33. CLEVER BRIDE

II-No. 47, 'Thieving Bride,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-91. Narrator unknown.

In *Tales*, 1950, the title of this anecdote is 'Clever Bride'. Armenians are very fond of roast chick-peas, and they are just as popular among Greeks and Turks.

34. A MAN MUST STRETCH HIS LEGS TO FIT HIS QUILT

II-No. 35, 'A Man Must Stretch His Legs to Fit His Quilt,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-82, narrator unknown. Based on a proverb.

35. THE LIAR

II-No. 36, 'The Liar,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-84, narrator unknown.

36. DEATH OF LITTLE KIKOS

Tales, 1950, 'Kikos,' 1939. The funeral feast is a must among Armenians.

37. THREE BROTHERS

II-No. 33, 'Three Brothers,' Navasardianz, probably 1876-82, narrator unknown.

38. THE MAN WHO KNEW HOW TO DIVIDE A CHICKEN

Tales, 1950, 'Wise Divider,' narrator an old refugee from Van, 1915.

39. MIGHTY DEZHIKO

Hamov-Hotov, 'Dezhiko.'

Armenian variant of the boastful fly-killer, 'Seven at a Blow'.

40. FATHER SLIK GOES TO PARADISE

X-No. 25, 'Father Slik,' Sahak Movsisian, 1901, narrator unknown.

Vol. X has been published before vols. VI-IX, which will appear later. All the tales in this volume are from the Moush-Taron region in the western sector of historic Armenia, collected by Sahak Movsisian, and edited for publication by his son the well-known poet and scholar Solomon Tarontsi.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church parish priests below the rank of vardapet are permitted to marry before they are ordained. Vardapets, doctors of the church, are celibate priests, and the higher ranks in the church hierarchy are open only to vardapets.

There are many jokes and anecdotes about priests, most of them told in a spirit of good fun. The village priest, himself a peasant, had little schooling in the more remote provinces, but a vardapet is expected to be a scholar, and some of the finest intellects among Armenians have been vardapets, engaged in teaching and writing.

Another vardapet besides Servantsian might be of interest to the reader of Armenian folktales. Servantsian was also a collector of folksongs, and he was followed by Komitas Vardapet (1869-1935), who taught music in the seminary at Echmiadzin. Komitas Vardapet's first concert in Paris, in 1906, was a revelation to French composers and music critics. According to an eye-witness account, Claude Debussy was so moved by the beauty of Armenia's folksongs that he knelt before Komitas, kissed his hand, and cried, 'You are a genius, holy father!' Another admirer of Komitas Vardapet was Romain Rolland, who wrote to the Armenian State Publishing House in a letter dated October 20, 1935: 'I am glad to know *Jean-Cristophe* is being translated into Armenian . . . the celebrated land of Armenia has been particularly dear to me with its beautiful songs, which I have admired for a long time'. Romain Rolland called Armenia a second Italy. (See *Historical-Philological Journal*, 4 (35), 1966, Erevan; in Armenian, with a resumé in Russian.) Armenia had begun to display to the outside world, with concerts and publications, the cultural riches of her national past and thus reassert her ancient ties with Europe. Komitas, a monk at Echmiadzin, was quickly recognized as one of the great composers of the twentieth century. He lost his mind when he witnessed the genocide of Western Armenians in 1915 and died insane in Paris.

